Stefan Aguirre Quiroga
White Mythic Space

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Stefan Aguirre Quiroga

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Racism, the First World War, and *Battlefield 1*

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For Adais, the love of my life.

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The path to this book began not with my first encounter with *Battlefield 1* in 2016, but rather with my first comment on Reddit's /r/AskHistorians. Joining what was then a young public history community on the Internet was an eye-opening experience that helped shape a young man deeply interested in history into the historian writing this today. It was on AskHistorians that I first met Dr. Nick Milne whose writings introduced me to the scholarly study of the First World War and its historiography, awakening my interest to learn more about the Great War. I am deeply grateful for Nick's desire to share his knowledge and for alerting me to the possibility of publishing a scholarly article on the First World War in literature and other forms of media in a special issue that he was co-editing, an article that would ultimately lay the foundation for this book. Nick was also one of the first moderators of AskHistorians, a team that I later became part of. I am very grateful for the effort, inspiration, and professionalism of past and present AskHistorians moderators and their collective wish to make scholarly history accessible to everyone. I want to extend a special thank you to P. Hunter Jones for his interest and support of my research over the years, and to Johannes Breit for his help in providing me with German source material. It would not have been possible to present the Afro-German perspective without his assistance.

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Introduction

There is something strange happening on AskHistorians, one of the largest forums for public history outreach on the internet with over 1 million subscribers. As a space for anyone to ask historical questions to experts, the forum hosted on the popular website Reddit attracts questions that range from the very specific ("Was painful Acne ever an issue in WW2?") to the general ("How did Vanilla become the "generic" flavor of ice cream?") and the amusing ("Why are there so many medieval paintings of people battling large snails?"). Yet one reoccurring question stands out amongst the rest. It is a question that in its essence questions the presence of people of color in the historical past of an assumed homogenously white Europe. Questions such as "Would there really have been black and Asian people in Mary Queen of Scot's and Elizabeth I's courts?", "Did black people occupy positions in European aristocracy, for example as courtesans or entertainers, roughly 1500 – 1800?", and "Were there black people in Norway in the 1860s?" are all examples of this strange phenomena.[1] A closer look reveals that the questions were all inspired by the presence of people of color in popular, fictional representations of history in film, television, and video games. The aforementioned questions, for example, were inspired by the historical drama film *Mary Queen of Scots* (2018), the television show *The Witcher* (2019), and the animated film *Frozen II* (2019).

I have been a moderator of AskHistorians since the fall of 2012 and I, as well as my fellow moderators and acknowledged experts on the forum, have been active in answering these sort of questions. Through my direct experience with the onslaught of questions that would inevitably arrive upon the release of a new historically inspired video game or period film that would concern the presence of people of color, which sometimes could simply be a background extra like the question "How historically accurate is Darkest Hour's portrayal of a black man

1 karenwalker85, "Would there really have been black and Asian people in Mary Queen of Scot's and Elizabeth I's courts?," *AskHistorians*, December 30, 2018, https://www.reddit.com/r/AskHistorians/comments/ab0950/would_there_really_have_been_black_and_asian; meta_system, "Did black people occupy positions in European aristocracy, for example as courtesans or entertainers, roughly 1500 – 1800?," *AskHistorians*, January 1, 2020, https://www.reddit.com/r/AskHistorians/comments/eimst7/did_black_people_occupy_positions_in_european; ItsMeTK, "Were there black people in Norway in the 1860s?," *AskHistorians*, November 22, 2019, https://www.reddit.com/r/AskHistorians/comments/dzv9r7/were_there_black_people_in_norway_in_the_1860s.

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on the tube?"[2] reveals, I found myself pondering the question why these inquiries were so frequent and popular. The majority, if not all, of the questions specifically questioned the presence of people of African ancestry, in particularly those identified as black (or sub-Saharan African) in historical representations. Why do these individuals question this presence while completely overlooking considerably more fantastical inclusions, including expert swordsmen, monsters, and a magical ice queen? Why do people deny the existence of people of African ancestry in popular representations of history, despite the fact that the historical record and modern historical scholarship acknowledges their presence? Was it born out of a rudimentary lack of knowledge about historical diversity, influenced by the Eurocentric history education that they received in school, or is there something more behind it? What role does racism play in the mindset of the individuals who made these inquiries?

The questions that began to take shape in my mind coincided with the announcement and subsequent release of the first-person shooter video game *Battlefield 1* (2016), set during the First World War and developed by the Swedish video game developer DICE. The highly anticipated addition to Electronic Arts *Battlefield* series drew intense interest in the days following the first upload of its reveal trailer on YouTube on May 6, 2016, garnering more than 22 million views and more than a million likes within the span of four days. While its competitor, Activision's *Call of Duty: Infinite Warfare* (2016), was maligned for its fictive futuristic theme, *Battlefield 1* was praised for its unique historical setting.[3] The praise lavished upon *Battlefield 1* for its First World War setting also became the source of its major criticism from parts of its player base when the reveal trailer was accompanied with a look at the cover art of the game. The cover art, which depicts a uniformed African American soldier, became a prominent part of the promotional material for the game. Vocal voices across social media rose up to question why there was a black man on the cover of a First World War game. These voices would multiply and grow even louder after the release of the game in the fall of 2016 as players discovered that several of the non-customizable soldier models in the game's multiplayer feature were of people of color. This, some players argued, was historically inaccurate and that with the exception of the African American soldier from the United States faction in

2 TomTryBull, "How historically accurate is Darkest Hour's portrayal of a black man on the tube?," *AskHistorians*, January 27, 2018, https://www.reddit.com/r/AskHistorians/comments/7tc80w/how_historically_accurate_is_darkest_hours.

3 Paul Tassi, "'Battlefield 1' Is The Most Liked Trailer In YouTube History, 'Infinite Warfare' The Most Disliked," *Forbes Magazine*, May 9, 2016, https://www.forbes.com/sites/insertcoin/2016/05/09/battlefield-1-is-the-most-liked-trailer-in-youtube-history-infinite-warfare-the-most-disliked.

the game, there were no soldiers of African ancestry fighting in Europe during the First World War, in particularly not for Great Britain or Germany as depicted in the game. This inclusion, they argued, was a form of "blackwashing" a conflict in which the majority of the soldiers who fought were white and that by including soldiers of African ancestry, the developers of the game were pushing a political agenda that was ruining the player's immersion into the time period and disrespecting the white soldiers who had died in the war.

As a young scholar with an interest in the experiences of non-white soldiers in modern military history, this caught me by surprise. The involvement of individuals of African ancestry on the Western Front is well-documented and undisputed within the field of First World War studies. Yet in the player community of *Battlefield 1*, the inclusion of soldiers of color was controversial and escalated over time to become a point of ridicule if not frustration and anger. In 2017, I began to closely follow the controversy online, collecting digital source material from a variety of online forums and social media, including YouTube, Reddit, and the official *Battlefield 1* Electronic Arts forum, to gain a deeper understanding of the arguments that were used to question and deny the presence of soldiers of color employed by the users of these sites. These arguments were later analyzed and published as the scholarly article "Race, Battlefield 1 and the White Mythic Space of the First World War" (2018) which this book expands upon.[4]

In analyzing the arguments, what I had expected to find were comments that were reflective of the #GamerGate movement, a viciously misogynistic online movement that in 2014 began to carry out gendered harassment campaigns and embraced extreme right conspiracy theories where the term "forced diversity" was particularly important and seen as proof of a conspiracy were the gaming industry at large was biased against white heterosexual men through the production of politically correct games that forced the (white male) gamer to play as women or men of color.[5] Unsurprisingly, therefore, I found comments that followed the #GamerGate discourse in regard to race and gender where Electronic

4 Stefan Aguirre Quiroga, "Race, Battlefield 1 and the White Mythic Space of the First World War," *Alicante Journal of English Studies* 31 (2018): 187–193. See also the accompanying article, Stefan Aguirre Quiroga and Iro Filippaki, "The Great War and the Use of Video Games as Historical and Educational Resources: A Conversation," *Alicante Journal of English Studies* 31 (2018): 195–199.

5 For an introduction to the #GamerGate movement, see Torill Elvira Mortensen, "Anger, Fear, and Games: The Long Event of #GamerGate," *Games and Culture* 13, no. 8 (2016): 787–806; and Sarah A. Aghazadeh et al., "GamerGate: A Case Study in Online Harassment," in *Online Harassment*, ed. Jennifer Goldbeck (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 179–207.

Arts and particularly DICE, being based in Sweden and therefore considered particularly liberal, were demonized for supposedly pushing a political agenda through the inclusion of soldiers of color. Accusations that DICE was pandering to "Social Justice Warriors" and attempting to force a left-wing ideology on players are frequently encountered in these discussions. However, #GamerGate discourse was not as common as I expected it to be. Instead, the majority of the arguments used by players of the game who opposed the inclusion were strictly rooted in the history of the First World War and early twentieth century Europe that they were familiar with, revolving specifically around the racist idea that people of color, in particularly men of African ancestry, did not belong in the time and place that they were depicted in. At their core, these arguments centered around creating separate black and white spheres, effectively segregating the virtual soldiers of color from spheres considered exclusively and historically white. Most importantly, I noticed, they were *defending* this white sphere from outside intrusion, moving beyond simply questioning the presence of soldiers of color but actively continuing to argue against inclusion even after they were informed that they are factually wrong.

What history were these players trying to defend? In searching for the answer to this question, I began to notice similarities between the gaming community I was investigating and similar inquiries with racist underpinnings made about the presence of people of color in other media. Across social media, many were using similar arguments and strategies to reject what they considered to be intrusion into a sphere in which people of color either did not belong in or simply did not exist. In order to understand this phenomena, I had to understand what they were defending. To this end, I created the theoretical concept of the White Mythic Space, a term inspired by cultural historian Richard Slotkin's discussion surrounding mythic spaces as pseudo-historical settings that are "powerfully associated with stories and concerns rooted in the culture's myth/ideological tradition."[6] I consider a white mythic space as being a historical or fictional (such as high fantasy or science fiction) setting that has been re-imagined as a racially homogenous space which consequently is considered to be the authentic representation of that setting despite what historical research has established or what the creators of the fictional universe had originally intended. White mythic space is a deliberately general theoretical term that is meant for use and application beyond *Battlefield 1* and video games because arguments rejecting people of color in popular culture goes beyond one specific medium. The

6 Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 233–234.

origins of white mythic spaces vary from case to case and it can be rooted in a variety of factors that include historiography and popular culture representations in the case of historical white mythic spaces. In this book, I will examine the creation of the white mythic space of the First World War that laid the foundation for the arguments against inclusion, a white mythic space that was established long before the invention of video games. I argue that the Eurocentric historical (collective) memory of the First World War laid the foundation of its white mythic space that has repeatedly been called upon by authors, filmmakers, and video game producers.

While this book will discuss and analyze the representation of people of color in the single and multiplayer features of *Battlefield 1* in relation to past representations of the First World War in popular media, it is not the main purpose of this study. Instead, this book is more preoccupied by the connection between historical memory and the reaction that the historical representation featured in *Battlefield 1* caused amongst players who engaged with the game before and after its release. In that aspect, this study differentiates itself from past research on popular portrayals of the First World War or representation of race in video games which has not commonly focused on the reception by its intended audience. There is a vast literature about the First World War that engages with how historical memory and how the conflict is portrayed in cinema, television, literature, and art, but considerably few that look at the representation of race within those works. Books such as Paul Fussell's seminal work *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975) and Dan Todman's *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (2005) are centered around a British perspective (and cultural productions thereof) but give no space to the wider non-white British Empire or the historical memory of soldiers of color who served in large numbers under the British flag, despite writing about how the memory of the First World War has been distorted over time.[7] Examining books not limited to the perspective of one nation, such as Michael Paris' *The First World War and Popular Cinema: 1914 to the Present* (1999) and David Williams' *Media, Memory, and the First World War* (2009), reveals a similar Eurocentric approach with little concern or mention of portrayals of race or soldiers of color in popular culture, continuing the overt focus on the Western Front.[8]

7 Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Dan Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2007).

8 Michael Paris, ed., *The First World War and Popular Cinema: 1914 to the Present* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999); David Williams, *Media, Memory, and the First World War* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009).

The increased interest in global, transnational, and colonial history in the last 20 years, and the lead up to the First World War centenary in 2014, has produced new research that emphasizes the *world* in First World War. *Race, Empire and First World War Writing* (2011), edited by Santanu Das, contains several important essays dealing with the portrayal of race and soldiers of color during the war itself and in post-war historical memory. Peter Stanley writes, for example, how Aborigines serving in the Australian Imperial Force were excluded from the post-war Anzac legend, the dominant reference point about the First World War in modern Australia, alongside the contemporary imperial and racial aspects of the Australian war experience. In the same volume, Mark Whalan writes of the portrayal of the war in African American literature and the impact that the war had on the Harlem Renaissance.[9] *The Great War in Post-Memory Literature and Film* (2014), edited by Martin Löschnigg and Marzena Sokolowska-Paryz, features essays by Anne Samson on depictions of the East Africa campaign in literature and by Richard Smith on the portrayal of West Indian soldiers in British television programs.[10] Smith elaborated upon the same subject in the article "The multicultural First World War: Memories of the West Indian contribution in contemporary Britain" where he wrote more broadly about the modern British memory of the West Indian contribution to the First World War in the context of the centenary commemorations.[11] Other important research includes Alison S. Fell and Nina Wardleworth's article on cultural representations of the *Tirailleurs Sénégalais*, Meghan Tinsley's article on the portrayal of Muslim soldiers in the BBC documentary *The Great War* (1964), and Liza-Mare Syron's article on the Aboriginal play *Black Diggers* (2014), set during the First World War.[12]

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9 Peter Stanley, "He was black, he was a White man, and a dinkum Aussie: race and empire in revisiting the Anzac legend," in *Race, Empire and First World War Writing*, ed. Santanu Das (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 213 – 230; Mark Whalan, "Not only war: the First World War and African American literature," in Das, *Race, Empire and First World Writing*, 283 – 300.

10 Anne Samson, "Fictional Accounts of the East Africa Campaign," in *The Great War in Post-Memory Literature and Film*, ed. Martin Löschnigg and Marzena Sokolowska-Paryz (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 379 – 410; Richard Smith, "Post-Colonial Melancholia and the Representation of West Indian Volunteers in the British Great War Televisual Memory," in Löschnigg and Sokolowska-Paryz, *The Great War in Post-Memory Literature and Film*, 385 – 396.

11 Richard Smith, "The multicultural First World War: Memories of the West Indian contribution in contemporary Britain," *Journal of European Studies* 45, no. 4 (2015): 347 – 363.

12 Alison S. Fell and Nina Wardleworth, "The Colour of War Memory: Cultural Representations of *Tirailleurs Sénégalais*," *Journal of War & Culture Studies* 9, no. 4 (2016): 319 – 334; Meghan Tinsley, "'We Will Re-Member Them': Muslims in the Great War Semi-Centenary," *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 14, no. 3 (2014): 399 – 417; Liza-Mare Syron, "'Addressing a Great Silence': *Black Diggers* and the Aboriginal Experience of War," *New Theatre Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (2015): 223 – 231.

The First World War centenary coincided with an increased scholarly interest in First World War gaming in conjunction with an increased production of First World War video games. In an early article on First World War air combat simulation from 2013, Andrew Wackerfuss could confidently state that "options for WWI wargaming are surprisingly limited [...] there is no *Battlefield 1916*."[13] In the following three years, the state of First World War gaming would change with the release of popular games such as *Valiant Hearts: The Great War* (2014), *Verdun* (2015), and *Battlefield 1*. Since Wackerfuss, Adam Chapman, Iro Filippaki, and Debra Ramsay have written about how the First World War is portrayed in video games in relation to subjects such as historical memory, posthumanist memorialization, and liminality.[14] The most influential and prolific scholar within the field of First World War gaming is Chris Kempshall, whose *The First World War in Computer Games* (2015) is the first full-length book to specifically examine the representation of the First World War in gaming, writing about themes such as narrative, space, and combat in relation to the historical memory of the First World War.[15]

However, despite the pioneering work that has been done in this nascent field, the historical memory that has been studied in conjunction with First World War gaming has been predominantly concerned with traditional narratives centered on Europe and the Western Front, although recent research has begun to go beyond that traditional scope. Ramsay briefly discusses how *Battlefield 1* introduces alternative First World War narratives centered on gender and race and how the game challenges preconceptions of the war, while also mentioning the reception that this portrayal has received by referencing a YouTube video made by Youtuber jackfrags on the inclusion of Harlem Hellfighters, an African American regiment that saw heavy combat during the war, in the game. Ramsay writes that "respondents to [the video] discuss their [Harlem Hellfighters] significance to history, issues of racism in representations of the past,

13 Andrew Wackerfuss, "'This Game of Sudden Death': Simulating Air Combat of the First World War," in *Playing with the Past: Digital Games and the Simulation of History*, ed. Matthew Wilhelm Kapell and Andrew B.R. Elliott (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 233.

14 Adam Chapman, "It's Hard to Play in the Trenches: World War I, Collective Memory and Videogames," *Game Studies* 16, no. 2 (2016): http://gamestudies.org/1602/articles/chapman; Iro Filippaki, "Great War Games: Notes on Collective Memory, the Adynaton, and Posthumanism," *Alicante Journal of English Studies* 31 (2018): 177–185; Debra Ramsay, "Liminality and the Smearing of War and Play in *Battlefield 1*," *Game Studies* 20, no. 1 (2020): http://gamestudies.org/2001/articles/ramsay.

15 Chris Kempshall, *The First World War in Computer Games* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). See also Chris Kempshall, "Pixel Lions – the image of the soldier in First World War computer games," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 35, no. 4 (2015): 656–672.

and the wider relationship between games and history."[16] Although this is a correct description of the comment section of the video, Ramsay does not take into consideration the possibility that the comment section is actively moderated and that the abusive and racist answers have been removed. Furthermore, as evidenced by the research presented in this book, the comment section in the jackfrags video is an aberration within the online discourse surrounding *Battlefield 1* and race. This is made evident by a comment made on the video by user Obey Gaming who told of his experience of sharing his enthusiasm for the inclusion of African American soldiers in the game, only to face "racist backlash from ignorant bigots".[17] Recent research by Kempshall has looked closer at the historiography behind *Valiant Hearts* and *Battlefield 1*, examining the sources used by the developers of the games to inform their approach to the historical setting and discussing how this in turn was manifested in the final product. This has provided a deeper understanding of the intentions behind *Battlefield 1* and how the developers of the game were consciously trying to break out of past historiographical trends that centered the war on the Western Front. Furthermore, in similarity with Ramsay, Kempshall briefly investigates the introduction of alternative First World War narratives in *Battlefield 1*, but is considerably more critical than Ramsay about the reception by players to this inclusion by divulging details on the racist backlash to the game and discussing the notion of authenticity in relation to audience reception and First World War video games.[18] In order to understand the narrative and racist underpinnings of the white mythic space of the First World War, it is important to understand the notions of historical accuracy and immersion, two important keywords in arguments rejecting soldiers of color, as they apply to players of the game. Kempshall's discussion on historical accuracy out of the perspective of video game producers has therefore been particularly valuable in order to understand the other side.

Although research into the representation of race and historical video games is still in its infancy, research into the representations of race in video games has grown exponentially within the wider field of video games studies but is still

16 Ramsay, "Liminality and the Smearing of War and Play in *Battlefield 1*."

17 Obey Gaming, May 17, 2016, comment on jackfrags, "The Harlem Hellfighters – Battlefield 1," *YouTube*, May 16, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fwddg0cCVgI&lc=UggvEC93v7TaXgCoAEC.

18 Chris Kempshall, "War collaborators: documentary and historical sources in First World War computer games," *First World War Studies* 10, no. 2–3 (2020): 225–244.

slowly emerging out from of the margins.[19] This interdisciplinary research has looked at a wide variety of subjects, both broad and specific, ranging from depictions of racial stereotypes (and the consequences of such depictions), such as Joshua L. Green's concept of "digital blackface", to Rebecca Mir and Trevor Owens' research into the representation of indigenous peoples in *Sid Meier's Civilization IV: Colonization* (2008) and Lisa Nakamura's research into the "racialization of labor in World of Warcraft".[20] *Gaming Representation: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Video Games* (2017), edited by Jennifer Malkowski and TreaAndrea M. Russworm, collects several essays that consider the question of representation and identity in video games, four of which specifically deals with the subject of race and diversity. Russworm's essay on racial representation in *The Walking Dead: Season One* (2012–2013) and *The Last of Us* (2013) has been particularly influential in how I have analyzed the single player mode in *Battlefield 1*.[21] Research on the reception of racial representation in video games is scarcer. One of the pioneering scholars on race and video games, Anna Everett, and S. Craig Watkins have written about how video games have influenced young people's understanding of race and how and what they learn about race through their interaction with the medium. Within the study, the authors have analyzed online discussions held on the GameSpot forums about race and the representation of race in relation to the *Grand Theft Auto* series to reveal the complexity of "gamers' racial attitudes and belief systems." In conclusion, the authors write that the expressions in the discussions "range from blatant racism to racial tolerance or inclusion", although little to no direct analysis is given to the quotes presented in the text. Admittedly, they write, "these sites [forums] are worthy of more detailed analysis" than the approximately three pages they dedicate

19 See Anna Everett, Foreword to *Gaming Representation: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Video Games*, ed. Jennifer Malkowski and TreaAndrea M. Russworm (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), ix–xv.

20 Melinda C.R. Burgess et al., "Playing With Prejudice: The Prevalence and Consequences of Racial Stereotypes in Video Games," *Media Psychology* 14 (2011): 289–311; Joshua L. Green, "Digital Blackface: The Repackaging of the Black Masculine Image" (M.A. thesis, Miami University, 2006); Rebecca Mir and Trevor Owens, "Modeling Indigenous Peoples: Unpacking Ideology in *Sid Meier's Colonization*," in Kapell and Elliott, *Playing with the Past*, 91–106; Lisa Nakamura, "Don't Hate the Player, Hate the Game: The Racialization of Labor in World of Warcraft," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 26, no. 2 (2009): 128–144.

21 TreaAndrea M. Russworm, "Dystopian Blackness and the Limits of Racial Empathy in *The Walking Dead* and *The Last of Us*," in Malkowski and Russworm, *Gaming Representation*, 109–128.

to it.[22] Providing a more detailed analysis of discussions about race in online forums related to gaming is what I hope to do in this book.

The investigation that is carried out in this book is done with the methodologies and theoretical thinking of historical studies. It is a form of digital history as it investigates historical memory and racism in online communities through the collection and interpretation of born-digital primary sources.[23] The purpose of this book is to bridge the gap between historical studies and video game studies, and to show how the framework of historical memory can be used to analyze representation of race in historical video games and the reception of said representation by the players of the games, guided by the theoretical concept of the white mythic space. With the popularity of video games in historical settings ranging from the *Assassin's Creed* series to *Call of Duty: Black Ops Cold War* (2020), all with large and passionate player bases, it would seem particularly fruitful to connect the study of historical memory to the study of video games and racial representation. This would increase our understanding of how the historical memory of the player influences how they engage with the game's depiction of its historical setting and how, in turn, the video game can influence the historical memory of the player. As Malkowski and Russworm write, "Representation and identity have often been sidelined in game studies with the implicit justification that the discipline should focus instead on the richer objects of code and of game platforms as complex systems—not audiovisual surfaces."[24] As video game studies have thankfully began moving away from such notions, the time is ripe for historical studies to engage in a mutual dialogue with video games studies in order to understand why there are those who question the presence of people of color.

This book has been written with more than the specialist or advanced student in mind. It is a book intended to be read by a broader readership than is customary for a scholarly monograph and has been written in a way so as to be suitable for students, teachers, experts, and laymen alike. I have made the conscious choice to make it an accessible but scholarly rigorous book, meant for both beginners and advanced readers, because of the serious and important topic of online racism. It is a book written for those who would like to understand the reasons behind common arguments against the inclusion of people of color in popular culture as well as for those who are interested in contempo-

22 Anna Everett and S. Craig Watkins, "The Power of Play: The Portrayal and Performance of Race in Video Games," in *The Ecology of Games: Connecting Youth, Games, and Learning*, ed. Katie Salen (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2008), 141–160.

23 Anna Nilsson Hammar, "Digital History," *Scandia* 81, no. 2 (2015): 99–110.

24 Malkowski and Russworm, *Gaming Representation*, 3.

rary racism on the internet and in online fan communities. While this book uses *Battlefield 1* as a case study, the sad truth is that this book could have been written about any popular video game series, film franchise, television show, or similar types of media which have attracted online controversy due to the inclusion of people of color. The historical setting of *Battlefield 1* has made it possible for this book to serve as an introduction into the study of historical memory and how it can be related to the study of video games, while simultaneously introducing the theoretical term white mythic space which can be used to analyze popular representations of the First World War (and other historical and non-historical representations of people of color in media). Ultimately, my wish is that a student or a high school teacher will be able to pick up this book, read it, and feel that they can apply what they have learnt in this book to what they might encounter in the classroom or online. To this end, this book also functions as a handbook for confronting the arguments that are featured and analyzed in the book. Racism and discrimination should never go unchallenged and a passive attitude towards the thousands of comments made across social media in favor of excluding the representation of people of color only helps to strengthen white mythic spaces.

Organization of Chapters

Chapter 1, *Between History and Myth*, will introduce the readers to the study of historical memory as well as the theoretical framework used in this book to frame the subsequent study in Chapter 2. Why do we remember the history that we do? What is historical memory? In the first part of this chapter, I will provide an accessible introduction into historical memory in order to explain how people think, remember, and use history. I draw on several examples of different types of historical memory and how they are spread in society to show the power that historical memory has in shaping our understanding of the past and creating a historical consciousness that might ultimately be wrong or exclusionary. In the subsequent section, I will introduce and explain the theoretical term white mythic space which can be used to understand the rejection of people of color from historical and speculative fiction. It will explore the origins and central tenets of white mythic space, in addition to examining its connection to racism as well as other scholarly theories that analyze memory or representations of race in popular culture. After the introductions of these methodological tools and theoretical approaches, this chapter will look at the history of participation of soldiers of color in the First World War in order to show the global and multiracial scale of the war. Afterwards, I will provide an overview of the post-war inclusion

of soldiers of color in First World War popular representation (primarily visual mediums such as films and video games) in Europe and the United States up until the first three years of the First World War centenary (2014 – 2016) and the release of *Battlefield 1* to give the reader an understanding of the increased inclusion of soldiers of color in twenty-first century depictions of the First World War.

Chapter 2, *Defending the White Mythic Space*, will start by introducing *Battlefield 1*, taking the reader through the release of the game, the inclusion of soldiers of color in the game's single player and multiplayer features, and discussing the historical aims of the game producers as well as discussing the historical content as it relates to soldiers of color, with an emphasis on the single player narrative *Storm of Steel* that features African American soldiers. Do the producers of the game achieve what they originally set out to do? How are soldiers of color represented in the game? The chapter will then proceed to analyze the backlash and subsequent rejection of soldiers of color in the game by players from the initial reveal of the game's cover art in 2016 to the launch of the game's multiplayer features. It will guide the reader through comments and observations made on Reddit, the official *Battlefield 1* Electronic Arts forum, YouTube, and a series of other websites and social media to provide an understanding of the racist discourse surrounding the game and the shape that the defense for the white mythic space took in these online gaming communities. The chapter will discuss concepts such as "historical accuracy", "immersion", and the ways through which players actively sought to minimize or outright reject the presence of soldiers of color through historical arguments as well as through racist mockery. It will also consider how these arguments are placed within a wider conspiratorial far-right framework that is used to rationalize why soldiers of color are "forcibly included" in the game. In order to avoid the risk of making the arguments appear to be more tame than they actually are by summarizing them, I have made the decision to extensively quote the original comments in their unaltered form in order for the reader to read them the way they would have encountered the arguments online.

The final chapter, titled *Aftermath, Conclusion, and Future*, will wrap up and summarize my findings from the previous two chapters in order to briefly explain why the mythic white space of the First World War came to be established and the shape in which those who opposed the inclusion defended this space. This chapter will first examine the years following the release of the *Battlefield 1*, looking at the subsequent history of the game through its four expansions which increased the diversity of the game. This section examines how gender intersects with the white mythic space of the First World War and how the inclusion of women into the game brought a new dynamic that was a foretaste of a

new, future controversy surrounding the next installment in the *Battlefield* franchise: *Battlefield V*. Although only briefly examining the subject of gender, the end of this section is meant to encourage future researchers to look closer at the gender aspects of the white mythic space and how gender is used in conjunction with race to exclude groups of people who are deemed incompatible with the white mythic space. The following section will summarize my findings from Chapter 2, arguing that the racist arguments used to reject soldiers of color from *Battlefield 1* reflect contemporary wartime arguments which were used to reject soldiers of color from fighting in the First World War. Furthermore, this section will look beyond the confinements of *Battlefield 1* and briefly consider the white mythic space within a broader context. Finally, this chapter will look towards the future. After a brief overview of how First World War representations of soldiers of color in popular culture began to be increasingly normalized, I will give an overview of the 2020 controversy when a British actor complaining about the diversity present in the film *1917* used many of the same arguments that I have examined in Chapter 2, before asking one final question: what can we do to dismantle the white mythic space?

Between Myth and History

In February 2014, the year that marked the beginning of the First World centenary, the British Council published a report titled "Remember the World as Well as the War" that looked closer at the levels of knowledge around the world of the First World War as a global conflict. In the report, the British Council published their findings from an international survey about the war that was carried out by YouGov in the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Russia, Turkey, India, and Egypt during September 2013. The findings revealed that the majority of the respondents were unaware of the war outside of Europe. On average across the seven countries, 82% were aware of the involvement of Western Europe in the war while 67% were aware of the involvement of Eastern Europe. When asked about the rest of the world's involvement in the war, there is a dramatic drop in knowledge. On average, 29% knew about the involvement of the Middle East while the corresponding numbers were 28% for North America, 17% for Asia, and 14% for Australia and New Zealand. Only 11% knew of the involvement of Africa in the war while knowledge about the Latin American involvement in the war was only 5%. The report notes that "the highest level of knowledge of African involvement among the countries polled was approximately one in five people in the UK and Germany", while in France, it was "only about one in ten." In the other countries that were polled, only one in 20 were aware that Africa played a role in the war. Yet despite this, many respondents from all seven countries acknowledged the First World War as an important global event in the twentieth century, with an average of 72% answering that the consequences of the war still have a lasting impact on their countries.[25]

How did this come to be? How is it that 74% of the respondents in India knew of the Western Front while only 12% knew of the African involvement in the war, despite the fact that two Indian Expeditionary Forces (IEF B and IEF C) were sent to fight on the African continent between 1914 and 1918? Why is it, as the report reveals, that the major associations that British people have about the First World War are tied to the Western Front in the shape of images of trenches, mud, gas, poppies, poor leadership, death, and loss of life as well as specific events like the Battle of the Somme and the battle of Ypres?[26] This chapter looks to answer these questions, and many more, by giving an introduc-

25 Anna Bostanci and John Dubber, *Remember the World as Well as the War* (London: The British Council, 2014), 4–16.

26 Bostanci and Dubber, *Remember the World*, 6.

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tion into the concept of historical memory and introducing the theoretical term white mythic space.

Remembering the Past

Why do we remember history in the way that we do? Where do all the associations, stories, and concepts that we connect with certain events in history come from? To answer these questions, and the questions that are the focus of this book, we first need to understand what history is. In a simplified way, Peter Aronsson describes history as a concept that is divided into three separate parts, each with a different function, that are connected together in the pursuit of history. The first part is the past, everything that has ever happened and as it actually happened. The second part is the pursuit of knowledge about history and the practices that attempt to reconstruct the past in our present day. In this part, we count activities such as historical research, the teaching of history, as well as personal memory, the act of remembering a point in one's own personal past for those in the present. The third and last part is the representation of history, such as popular history books and magazines, historical novels, monuments, reenactments, and of course, video games.[27]

Aronsson's model is useful in giving a general overview of the different components that make up history as a concept, but it is limited by the fact that history is never this well-defined. For the purpose of this study, it is helpful in providing an understanding that the academic study of history is separate from the representation of history in popular culture and non-academic spaces. Although these two spheres interact and influence each other (historians serve as historical consultants for film, television, and video games while the study of how history is represented in these visual mediums is part of the academic study of history), they are not the same and are separate with some common ground.[28] For example, even though a historical film does not reflect current historical scholarship, the filmmaker and the historian are both influenced by contemporary political and social contexts in the construction of their interpretation of history. Some historians and theorists have gone further and made the argument that the dichotomy between history as truth and fiction as invention is no longer relevant and that these opposites has always had aspects of fiction or history pre-

27 Peter Aronsson, *Historia* (Malmö: Liber, 2011), 14.

28 For more information on the use of historical consultants for First World War video games, see Kempshall, "War collaborators," 9–10.

sent in them.[29] While this complicated and disputed question is not the focus of this study, the boundaries between history and fiction is something that is central to this book. The space between myth, history, and fiction is where we find historical memory.

Historical memory is known by many names that include collective memory, social memory, and popular memory. What these names reveal is something that is at the core of historical memory: it is a shared concept, differentiating itself from personal memory that is exclusive to the individual and which can be turned into a primary source.[30] Aronsson defines historical memory as "the established perceptions that people have about the past. This memory is the selection and internalization of a culture of history by individuals and social groups." A culture of history, in turn, is defined as an "umbrella term for the artifacts imbued with meaning and narratives that the historical memory has to work with and choose from." Historical consciousness is an additional term that is important in this context, which is defined as "the way in which an established perception builds up a general understanding about how the past is connected with the current present and the possible futures." Together, these three terms form a model in which "*historical memory* shapes *historical consciousness* and interacts with a *culture of history.*"[31]

It is important to emphasize that remembering is a social act that happens in the present and connects the individual to a larger collective identity. In similarity with other forms of history, a vital function of historical memory is that it seeks to reconstruct the past, often in the pursuit or strengthening of a collective identity.[32] There is no identity, personal or collective, that does not anchor itself in a historical past that can speak about the origins of the Self or about Us while simultaneously explaining how We arrived at the present time. It became increasingly common for nations during the nineteenth century to use history in order project the idea of the nation and the nascent national collective backwards into the past, in some cases hundreds or even thousands of years prior, to legitimize it. From this came a national identity and a historical memory

29 See Beverly Southgate, *History Meets Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 2009), for an in-depth look into the different theories and arguments.

30 The exact definition of the individual terms and how interchangeable they really are is part of a larger debate. See Geoffrey Cubitt, *History and Memory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 13–18.

31 Peter Aronsson, "Historiekultur i förändring," in *Makten över minnet: Historiekultur i förändring*, ed. Peter Aronsson (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2000), 18–19. In Swedish, the terms are *historiskt minne*, *historiemedvetande,* and *historiekultur.*

32 Cubitt, *History and Memory*, 118–140.

where origins, traditions, and a long history helped bring citizens together in an imagined community.[33] Historical memory can invoke heroes, victories, and great achievements, real or imagined, of the past, but also traumas, injustices, atrocities, and conflicts which can shape the historical consciousness of the individual or group, and in turn influence choices made in the present. But historical memory is not only reserved for the use of a collective as big as that of a nation. For example, historical memory can be found in physical places, such as a town, a house, or a battlefield, in groups such as sports teams, community organizations, and political parties, as well as among religious, cultural, sexual, and racial minorities.

How is historical memory spread in society? The dissemination of historical memory has its origin in the first childhood encounter with history, often framed within family history: the experiences and historical context of parents and grandparents, or even generations further backwards in time. Later in life, historical memory is influenced by diverse sources, all with their own intentions for sharing their specific version of the past. Academic historians and scholars influence historical memory through their research and publications, but arguably do not wield as much influence over historical memory that a schoolteacher or schoolbooks in history might have. Museums, historical sites, memorials, statues, and monuments also participate in the continued spread of a specific historical memory. Journalists and popular historians also partake in the shaping of historical memory, both through the publication of articles, radio programs, and widely read books, but also through podcasts and documentaries. In the digital age, they have been joined by enthusiastic amateurs online who create their own podcasts or YouTube channels focused on history. Paintings and forms of historical art can shape images of the past, in similarity to the power of architecture and historical novels in sharing ideas and associations about the past. Politicians and other public figures, as well as political parties, also play a role in disseminating historical memory. For example, the forty-fifth President of the United States, Donald Trump, famously used the slogan "Make America Great Again" (MAGA) during his 2016 presidential campaign, extolling a nostalgic and mythic image of a prosperous United States in the past and contrasting it against an imaginary downtrodden United States in present. Audiovisual media, such as films, television programs, and video games, hold a particularly strong influence over the shaping of historical memory. If historical memory is the shaping of collective images of the past then powerful visual representations can become strong points of reference for what is perceived to have happened in

33 Aronsson, *Historia*, 74–78.

the past.[34] Consider the invasion of Normandy during the Second World War. What do you imagine when you think of D-Day (June 6, 1944)? Perhaps it is the famous photographs taken by Robert Capa or Robert F. Sargent's photograph, *Taxis to Hell – and Back – Into the Jaws of Death,* showing American soldiers exiting a landing craft and wading towards Omaha Beach, that you think of. However, it is more likely that you think of the depiction of D-Day in the film *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), which in turn would inspire the depictions of D-Day in the video games *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* (2002), *Call of Duty 2* (2005), and several other depictions of D-Day across the audiovisual medium.[35]

As in the case with academic history and fictional representations of history, historical memory is constructed from different sources. The origins of the historical memory of a specific historical event is not something that is always created long after the fact when the event has been mythologized, but can have its origin during the event itself or in its direct aftermath that helps to create that mythology which is built upon over the decades or centuries. It is a memory that is cultivated by groups or individuals, writers and artists, politicians and activists, who see a particular function in their selection of narratives and associations to craft or shape a historical memory. Historical memory is therefore not static and will see its components change or adjust according to new contemporary contexts. This change is best exemplified by a scene from the film *Back to the Future Part III* (1990). In 1955, Marty McFly (from 1985) tries to rescue his friend, Emmett "Doc" Brown, who is stuck in the year 1885. In order to do so, he has asked Doc Brown's younger self for help. In a scene showing the preparation for the impending time travel to 1885, Marty is off-screen trying on clothes that the younger Doc Brown has given him. Doc: "The clothes fit?" Marty (off-screen): "Yeah. Everything except the boots, Doc. They're kinda tight. I don't know, you sure this stuff is authentic?" Doc: "Of course! Haven't you ever seen a Western?" The scene then cuts to Marty coming out wearing a baby blue and pink fringed Western shirt with colorful embroidery, bright red pants, with a red bandana hanging around his neck and a ten-gallon hat. Marty: "Yeah, I have, Doc, and Clint Eastwood never wore anything like this." While Doc has no clue of who Clint East-

34 Cubitt, *History and Memory*, 175 – 197; David Ludvigsson, "Den audiovisuella historien," in Aronsson, *Makten över minnet*, 78 – 90. Aronsson, "Historiekultur i förändring," 15 – 18; Douglas Schrock et al., "The Emotional Politics of Making America Great Again: Trump's Working Class Appeals," *Journal of Working-Class Studies* 2, no. 1 (2017): 5 – 22.

35 For an older generation, the film *The Longest Day* (1962) would likely be the first visual reference. On the link between Saving Private Ryan and video games, see Trent Cruz, "It's Almost Too Intense: Nostalgia and Authenticity in Call of Duty 2," *Loading: The Journal of Canadian Game Studies* 1 (2007).

wood is, the audience is aware of a shift in aesthetics between the Westerns of the 1950s and the revisionist Westerns as exemplified by Clint Eastwood's character in Sergio Leone's *Dollars* trilogy (1964–1966). The changing ideas of authenticity between the 1950s and the 1980s as it relates to the "Wild West" is a clear example of a change in historical memory. Although played up for comedic effect, Doc Brown's choice of a vaquero/rodeo-inspired western outfit would not have been completely out of place in the historical memory of the "Wild West" in the 1950s while the outfit Marty wears later in the film, in 1885, draws fully on Marty's (and the audience's) own historical memory of the "Wild West" as depicted in Leone's films.

The American "Wild West" also functions as a good example to show how historical memory is constructed and spread. The 1860s saw the birth of a new form of literature: the dime novel, mass produced and cheap books aimed at an increasingly literate working-class readership. Filled with adventures and thrills, these novels first drew heavily on stereotypes, narratives, and tropes from the work of James Fenimore Cooper and his historical novels that are collectively known as *The Leatherstocking Tales* (1823–1850), including the famous novel *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826). Dime novels soon began to set their stories in the present and populated them with fictional and real-life heroes and heroines, like Jesse James and Calamity Jane, taken from newspaper articles and books about the west.[36] Sensationalist articles, in turn, sold newspapers and contributed to shaping the image of the American west as a violent and lawless place. Robert R. Dykstra and Jo Ann Manfra have written of how one particularly violent year (1872–1873) in Dodge City, Kansas, led to years of newspapers publishing sensationalist pieces that created Dodge City's reputation as the quintessential lawless and violent western town, despite the fact that the city saw no violent deaths for the following two years and then only two violent deaths on average per year between 1876 and 1886.[37] Dime novels and sensationalist newspaper articles thrust unsuspecting real-life individuals into the national limelight and turned them into celebrities. One such person was the buffalo hunter and Army scout "Buffalo Bill" Cody who was turned into a dime novel hero after the publication of *Buffalo Bill, the King of the Border Men* (1869). During the 1870s, Cody participated in a series of melodramatic plays capitalizing on his

36 Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 8–10, 151–155; Jefferson D. Slagle, "The Heirs of Buffalo Bill: Performing Authenticity in the Dime Western," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 39, no. 2 (2009): 125–128; Daniel Worden, "Masculinity for the Million: Gender in Dime Novel Westerns," *Arizona Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (2007): 39–53.

37 Robert R. Dykstra and Jo Ann Manfra, *Dodge City and the Birth of the Wild West* (Lawrence: Kansas University Press, 2017), 22–65.

fame as a western hero on the American East Coast. In the early 1880s, Cody created *Buffalo Bill's Wild West*, a performance show that drew inspiration from theatre plays and the circus to create a show that mixed fiction with authenticity in order to establish an image of the "Wild West" as reality. As the title of the show implies, it was not a show, it was simply *Wild West*. Praised for its entertainment as well as for its supposed educational value, it was embraced by audiences all along the American East Coast, as well as in Europe, that between 1882 and 1906 saw the American frontier as an equally exotic and distant place as we do today.[38] These dime novelists, reporters, and showmen in collaboration with authors like Theodore Roosevelt and Owen Wister crafted an historical memory of the American West as the violent "Wild West" that novelists, painters, filmmakers, comic book writers, and television producers would continue to spread during the twentieth century and adapt to new social and political contexts. Iconic and seemingly authentic Western images of high noon duels, attacks on stagecoaches, gunfighters and outlaws, and lone sheriffs cleaning up towns from lawless elements all have their origin in fictional treatments of the American West during the nineteenth and twentieth century. Today, the representation of the late nineteenth century American West as a particularly violent place, characterized by shoot-outs and attacks by Native Americans, are part of a historical memory that stretches beyond the borders of the United States.

Whose historical memory is being remembered? For every individual and collective identity in relation to the past that historical memory constructs, it also creates boundaries. For every *Us*, there are *Others*. Historical memory is selective and can be used to exclude elements and narratives that are not considered to belong in the collective. In the case of the "Wild West", the indigenous peoples of the American West were commonly portrayed as homogenous, faceless, and ruthless savages that attacked white pioneers without any provocation and whose extermination by the heroes of the films, books, or television shows was necessary for the advancement of White civilization. Although cinematic portrayals of Native Americans would change, with films as early as the 1950s giving sympathetic treatments of Native Americans, the dichotomy of "cowboys and Indians" as a central signifier of the "Wild West" still remains.[39] While Native Americans were portrayed as enemies, African Americans on the other hand were mostly absent from mainstream portrayals. If they or other minorities like

38 Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 35, 67–87; Joy S. Kasson, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West: Celebrity, Memory, and Popular History* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2000), 11–236.

39 For the history of portrayals of Native Americans in Westerns, see Angela Aleiss, *Making the White Man's Indian: Native Americans and Hollywood Movies* (Westport: Praeger, 2005).

Latinos or Asians were featured, it was commonly in a marginalized, stereotyped role. Historical memory as a tool for exclusion will be discussed further in the next section of this chapter.

Who is in control of historical memory? This is a complex question with no easy answer. National triumph or trauma can make certain dominant historical memories endure without competing narratives. In Chile, the War of the Pacific (1879–1884) against Peru and Bolivia is part of the nation's claim for exceptionalism and the successful outcome of the war made Chile a powerhouse in the region for decades afterwards. The historical memory of the conflict has remained unchallenged and is practically identical to the nationalist rhetoric of war-time Chile that was reproduced by subsequent historians. Daniel Parodi Revoredo has investigated Chilean schoolbooks published between 1982 and 2007, and discovered that the books discuss the war as a nineteenth century epic, with a unified and orderly Chilean society going up against mischievous and treacherous enemies that do not stand a chance against Chile's valiant and romantic heroes.[40] The losers of the war, Peru and Bolivia, not only faced defeat on the battlefield but would ultimately lose territory. As a consequence of the war, Bolivia lost its coast and became landlocked. The Bolivian nationalist historical memory of the war is one of humiliation and a desire for retribution – and for regaining their lost access to the sea. These two nationalist historical memories continue to have an impact in the twenty-first century as Chile negotiates with Bolivia over the ongoing dispute over the Pacific coast. Writing in the context of the dispute's appearance in the UN's International Court of Justice, which ultimately ruled in favor of Chile in 2018, Parodi Revoredo argues that instead of facing new realities in the modern post-national era, Chile and Bolivia entrench themselves in their historical memory of a glorious past – one of victory and one of resistance.[41]

What happens when there are competing and contested historical memories about the same event in a nation's history? One example of the controversy that can arise was the ill-fated exhibition "The Last Act: The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II" that was supposed to open in the Smithsonian's Air and Space Museum in Washington D.C. in May 1995. Meant to be displayed alongside *Enola Gay*, the B-29 Superfortress that had dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima in 1945, the curators of the exhibition intended for it to let the visitors follow the path that the atomic bombs took in 1945, from the training of the aircrews to

40 Daniel Parodi Revoredo, *Lo que dicen de nosotros: la Guerra del Pacífico en la historiografía y textos escolares chilenos* (Lima: Universidad Peruana de Ciencias Aplicadas, 2010), 57–78.
41 Daniel Parodi Revoredo, "Victoria o fracaso: La Guerra del Pacífico y la autorrepresentación contemporánea de Chile," *Diálogo Andino* 57 (2018): 121–131.

the political and military decision to drop the bombs within the context of the final year of the war. It also intended to look at the effects of the bomb, weaving in the stories of the Japanese victims of Hiroshima with contemporary artifacts and photographs of the dead and wounded. Finally, the exhibition would connect the final stage of the Second World War with the opening stages of the Cold War, the nuclear arm race that followed, and the present danger of nuclear war. It was, in many ways, an exercise in how historical memory shapes historical consciousness. By presenting a scholarly view of the fateful events in 1945, the exhibition would have connected the past, the present, and the future of visitors who saw it in order to talk about how the legacy of Hiroshima and Nagasaki still concern us today and in the future. Yet this was never to be. News about the exhibition caused controversy as American veterans of the Second World War objected against this interpretation, calling upon their historical memory of the war and claiming that the exhibition ignored the sacrifices that American soldiers had made in the fight against the Japanese, effectively giving more credence to the Japanese side of the story than the American. Furthermore, they argued, the exhibition presented the Japanese people as victims and the atomic bombs as unnecessary. Subsequently, several organizations like the American Legion, the Air Force Association, and the Retired Officers Association got involved in order to support these arguments. Conservative politicians in the United States Senate and Congress as well as the conservative press also got involved in the controversy and lambasted not only the exhibition itself but the very practice of professional history. Ultimately, the *Enola Gay* was exhibited with nothing but a plaque, devoid of historical context.[42] When the *Enola Gay* was moved from the Air and Space Museum to the Smithsonian's Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center in 2003 it met with a new controversy, but this time from the other side as scholars, activists, and survivors of the atomic bombs protested against the lack of historical context in the *Enola Gay* display.[43]

Monuments, memorials, and statues will be our final example and will serve to showcase all of the elements that constitute historical memory. Monuments are some of the oldest and most lasting examples of public commemoration and remembrance in history. One of the earliest monuments to commemorate military victory, for example, is the Stele of Vultures (approximately 2460 B.C.)

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42 Michael J. Hogan, "The Enola Gay Controversy: History, Memory, and the Politics of Presentation", in *Hiroshima in History and Memory*, ed. Michael J. Hogan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 200 – 232.

43 Elizabeth Olson, "Criticism Meets New Exhibit of Plane That Carried A-Bomb," *New York Times*, November 2, 2003, https://www.nytimes.com/2003/11/02/us/criticism-meets-new-exhibit-of-plane-that-carried-a-bomb.html.

showing the defeat of the city-state Umma by Eannatum, ruler of the city-state Lagash, in modern-day Iraq. The large reach of monuments around the world means that answers to questions of who or what is being remembered or why they or it is being remembered will vary, but monuments have always taken a claim of historical memory in a physical space, reflecting the culture of history in the area and time period where and when it was erected. Often accompanied by a minimal inscription etched into the monument itself or on an accompanying plaque, the different commemorative purposes of monuments all serve to shape the historical consciousness of the individual gazing upon it, influencing them to make a connection between the past that is communicated to them through the monument and their own present and future. Whether it is to follow the example of an important leader or movement, to feel sorrow for the deaths incurred in a war, atrocity, or tragedy, or to be inspired by the achievements of a scientist or artist, monuments have the power to make us acknowledge and internalize a history that has been determined to be important to remember. It becomes a reminder of who we are, where we come from, and hopefully where we are going.[44]

The memory and the message that monuments carry represent those who erected it. Its purpose is to enforce a sense of belonging, a notion that lies at the core of historical memory. As has been pointed out previously, however, historical memory has the power to exclude significant parts of the supposed collective. In 2016, Caroline Criado-Perez investigated the representation of women in statues in the United Kingdom and concluded that out of 925 statues, only 158 were statues of women with half of them being allegorical figures rather than real-life historical figures (which made up only 28 % of the statues).[45] Furthermore, although the hope is that the historical memory imbued in the monument will be everlasting, this is never truly the case. While some monuments are restored, others are left to decay, sometimes moved to an obscure place or even removed altogether. What monuments are worth keeping and which ones are removed is always changing and does not always depend on questions surrounding interpretation, but also practical reasons such as construction and development in the current landscape the monument is situated in. The defacing, destruction, or removal of monuments has traditionally occurred in the wake

44 Peter Aronsson, *Historiebruk – att använda det förflutna* (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2004), 192–212.

45 Caroline Criado-Perez, "I sorted the UK's statues by gender – a mere 2.7 per cent are of historical, non-royal women," *New Statesman*, March 26, 2016, https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/feminism/2016/03/i-sorted-uk-s-statues-gender-mere-27-cent-are-historical-non-royal-women.

of revolutions and wars, marking the end of an era or the ascendance of one leader over the other. The toppling of the statue of the Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein in central Baghdad in April 2003 became an iconic image symbolizing the fall of the Saddam regime and the liberation of Baghdad. Yet the ensuing years of brutal war and foreign occupation changed the meaning imbued in the toppled statue and in turn the historical memory of April 2003 from one of euphoria to one of anger and regret. Kadhim Al-Jabbouri, one of the individuals involved in the toppling of the statue, explained in 2016 how ashamed he was of his involvement and that he would like to put it back up because "Saddam killed people, but it was nothing like this current government."[46] The change in meaning of a destroyed statue from signifying liberation of an oppressor to a nostalgic vision of the past before occupation shows the complex dynamics inherent in the construction of historical memory and how it is shaped by contemporary events.

The events following the 2015 Charleston church shooting where nine African Americans were murdered by a white supremacist has put the subject of historical memory at the center stage of public debate. The murderer's infatuation with the Confederate States of America, the losing side of the American Civil War (1861–1865) that fought to uphold the institution of slavery, put the southern historical memory known as "The Lost Cause" in the spotlight together with calls for the removal of monuments and symbols glorifying the Confederate cause. In the aftermath of the American Civil War, writers, politicians, and remembrance groups in the defeated southern states crafted a historical memory with main tenants which, as Reiko Hillyer writes, claims that "slavery was a benevolent institution that played little part in causing the sectional conflict; the Confederacy rightfully and nobly fought only to defend "states' rights" against northern invasion; during Reconstruction, Yankee aggressors, bent on destroying southern society, imposed negro domination upon a prostrate region."[47] This memory was spread throughout the south in the decades following the war, with its proponents moving away from memorializing the dead to actively spreading the white supremacist ideology inherent in the "Lost Cause" which effectively became the dominant narrative about the American Civil War, finding a place in everything from school textbooks to popular films such as *Gone With*

46 "I toppled Saddam's statue, now I want him back," *BBC*, July 5, 2016, https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-36712233.

47 Reiko Hillyer, "Relics of Reconciliation: The Confederate Museum and Civil War Memory in the New South," *The Public Historian* 33, no. 4 (2011): 37. For an in-depth view into the crafting of different historical memories surrounding the American Civil War, see David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

The Wind (1939). One important way in which this historical memory was disseminated was through the erection of monuments, something that Confederate associations like the United Daughters of the Confederacy (founded in 1894) and the Sons of Confederate Veterans (founded in 1896) were especially proficient in doing, scattering the southern landscape with monuments glorifying soldiers, generals, and politicians. This includes the Confederate Memorial Carving, a gigantic stone relief that depicts the holy trinity of the "Lost Cause" (General Robert E. Lee, General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, and Confederate President Jefferson Davis) and that was carved out between 1922 and 1978 on the side of Stone Mountain outside of Atlanta, Georgia.[48]

While monuments and other memorialization of the Confederacy became a point of pride and collective identity for White southerners, it held a different meaning for African Americans. They found themselves excluded from a southern identity based upon the romanticization of slave owners and plantations where their agency was reduced to being the "grateful slave". The memorialization of the Confederacy became a symbol for the historical and contemporary oppression of racial minorities in the south. A simple visit to a park or a city hall could become a reminder of a painful history and present as they faced tributes to men who wanted nothing else but to enslave their ancestors. In 1921, for example, a statue of "Stonewall" Jackson was erected in Charlottesville, Virginia, facing a park named after him that had been built on the former site of an African American neighborhood that had been torn down only a few years previously.[49] Charlottesville later became the place for the white supremacist and neo-Nazi Unite The Right rally in 2017 which was prompted by the calls for the removal of Confederate symbols, among them the "Stonewall" Jackson statue.[50]

According to a report by the Southern Law Poverty Center, the four years following the domestic terrorist attack in Charleston saw the removal of 47 public Confederate monuments while 780 Confederate monuments remain, some pro-

48 Jamey Essex, ""The Real South Starts Here": Whiteness, the Confederacy, and Commodification at Stone Mountain," *Southeastern Geographer* 42, no. 2 (2002): 211–225. On the activities of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, see Karen L. Cox, *Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003).

49 Grace Elizabeth Hale, "The Lost Cause and the Meaning of History," *OAH Magazine of History* 27, no. 1 (2013): 15–16; Gerald R. Webster and Johnathan I. Lieb, "Religion, Murder, and the Confederate Battle Flag in South Carolina," *Southeastern Geographer* 56, no. 1 (2016): 32.

50 Paul Duggan, "Charlottesville's Confederate statues still stand – and still symbolize a racist legacy," *Washington Post*, August 20, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2019/08/10/charlottesvilles-confederate-statues-still-stand-still-symbolize-racist-past/.

tected by state laws.[51] The controversy surrounding Confederate monuments has pushed questions of representation in historical memory to the forefront, challenging dominant white memory while tying it into current questions of institutional racism. This phenomenon went beyond the borders of the United States and targeted public monuments memorializing not only slavery, but colonialism and racism. Prior to the 2015 Charleston attack, a student movement in South Africa had begun protesting against the memorialization of the British imperialist Cecil Rhodes and the remaining legacies of colonialism in South African universities.[52] Following the 2020 murder of African American George Floyd by Minneapolis police, new calls for removal of Confederate monuments followed, with similar actions in Great Britain, France, and Belgium, with some activists taking the removal of monuments into their own hands in similarity to what South African and American activists had done in the previous years.[53]

At its most powerful, historical memory can turn a singular interpretation into historical fact. The events since 2015 are a reminder that history exists not only in the past but also in the present, and that it is important that we regularly ask ourselves whose history is being remembered.

If we return to the question I asked in the beginning of this chapter, the simple answer would be "historical memory". For the purpose of this study, a brief overview of the dominant modern historical memory of the First World War in Great Britain and the path it took to get there is informative. Dan Todman argues that the origins of the very specific associations that the majority hold about the First World War have their origins in the war itself, some even preceding the war. Ideas about poor aristocratic leadership were already present and a focus on combat soldiers on the Western Front remained dominant in war-time Britain. Vivid and famous photographs from the Western Front depicting trenches and soldiers struggling in the mud is a reflection of a reality that British, French, Ger-

51 Southern Law Poverty Center, "Whose Heritage? Public Symbols of the Confederacy," February 1, 2019, https://www.splcenter.org/20190201/whose-heritage-public-symbols-confederacy.

52 Eve Fairbanks, "The birth of Rhodes Must Fall," *The Guardian*, 18 November, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/news/2015/nov/18/why-south-african-students-have-turned-on-their-parents-generation.

53 Haroon Siddique and Clea Skopeliti, "BLM protesters topple statue of Bristol slave trader Edward Colston," *The Guardian*, June 7, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/jun/07/blm-protesters-topple-statue-of-bristol-slave-trader-edward-colston; Théo Anberrée, "Bruxelles: la statue équestre du Roi Léopold II à Trône vandalisée (photos)," *Le Soir*, June 10, 2020, https://www.lesoir.be/306202/article/2020-06-10/bruxelles-la-statue-equestre-du-roi-leopold-ii-trone-vandalisee-photos; Jade Dussart, "Taking down statues: France confronts its colonial and slave trade past," *Global Voices*, June 27, 2020, https://globalvoices.org/2020/06/27/taking-down-statues-france-confronts-its-colonial-and-slave-trade-past/.

man, and other soldiers had to endure on the Western Front and which many would go on to speak and write about. Gas, deployed in the spring of 1915 for the first time on the Western Front, was a weapon of horror that could not be easily forgotten, nor could the deaths of thousands of sons, brothers, husbands, fathers, and friends be forgotten by those who had lost them in the war. After the war, debates arose about the meanings of the war, the leadership, and how the dead were meant to be remembered.[54]

Yet that does not explain why the reality of a war, whose participants held different opinions on its meanings and outcomes, was distorted into fixed images of horror and mud on the Western Front, and as a meaningless and futile war, led by incompetent generals, with a fixation on death. These negative myths about the First World War, as Todman calls them, developed and changed over a long period of time. While the seeds were planted during the 1920s and 1930s, and reinforced by the Second World War, it was not until the 1970s that a singular, negative, dominant historical memory about the war became universal in Britain. Social, political, cultural, and demographic changes contributed to a unifying view of the First World War as a futile, horrific, and ultimately tragic war that should never have happened. Books like Alan Clark's *The Donkeys* (1961) and A.J.P. Taylor's *The First World War: An Illustrated History* (1963), the incredibly popular BBC2 26-part documentary series *The Great War* (1964), and the stage musical *Oh, What a Lovely War!* (1963) and its 1969 film adaption all helped to shape a specific image of the war as the elderly veterans that had previously been offering diverse views of the war began to pass away in large numbers. By the 1980s and 1990s, the hegemonic historical memory of the First World War was entrenched in British society. Like Todman writes, you would have been chased off the streets in the early 1920s if you had called the war futile and badly led, while by "1998, to say anything else was to arouse ridicule and anger."[55]

White Mythic Space

> It was just at dusk when they opened a terrific artillery fire on the wood. In five minutes half of our men were dead or wounded. Those who could, ran out and among those running was my brother Roy, carrying on his back a man thought to be wounded – it turned out he was dead – and then he too fell, killed by a shell that burst a little distance off and sent a small fragment of its casing straight into his heart.

54 Todman, *The Great War*, xi–72.

55 Todman, *The Great War*, 73–152, 221–230.

> We buried him with others next day, all wrapped up in blankets and placed in a field already established in anticipation of the battle, not far from where we had our camp. I cannot speak of how I felt. We were good friends and I was to be lonely for the rest of the war – lonely and bitter. Roy had a fine mind and a large and generous love of life and people. He intended to make writing his career and spent all his spare time when he was not talking to people, writing short stories and scenarios for the cinema.[56]

This account written years after the First World War by a British gunner in the Royal Field Artillery about the death of his brother on July 26, 1917, in the days leading up to the Third Battle of Ypres (Passchendaele), fits within the preconceived collective images that we have of the First World War. We can imagine the scene in our head: the British "Tommies" in their brown uniforms running among the dead and wounded as they try to escape the terrifying artillery fire. Perhaps the sky is grey and the ground covered by mud. There is the notion of tragedy in the death of the author's brother, a feeling of senselessness and futility. It all corresponds to the popular cultural image of the First World War up until the point that we consider race. Most would assume that the author was white and that his 21-year old brother Roy was white. Both men, Norman and Douglas Roy Manley, were in fact biracial. The white mythic space of the First World War erases the possibility of their race being anything but white in popular imagination. Both brothers were born in Jamaica and their shared experiences before and during the war were impacted by the color of their skin. As Norman Manley explains in his memoirs: "As far back as 1914 after the start of the first World War it was impossible to be in England and not be aware of the problem of colour. You were immediately aware in a thousand ways that you belonged elsewhere but not there."[57] Manley experienced racism and prejudice throughout his time in the British Army, but also camaraderie amongst the white soldiers that he trained and served alongside in the British Field Artillery:

> They shewed an innate courtesy, I suppose because we liked each other, and soon found out that I did not like being called "Darkie" as came natural to them, and I have heard a real tough guy get a hold of a new arrival, a casualty replacement, who automatically called me "Darkie", and take him aside and say, "Don't call him that – he doesn't like it. We call him Bill and we like him!".[58]

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56 Norman Washington Manley, "The Autobiography of Norman Washington Manley," *Jamaica Journal* 7, no. 1–2 (1973): 8.

57 Manley, "Autobiography," 5.

58 Manley, "Autobiography," 6.

Norman Manley would serve in the British Army until 1919 and went on to have a distinguished career, ultimately becoming the first Premier of Jamaica in 1959. Roy Manley is buried in Poperinghe New Military Cemetery in Belgium.

In the study of history, historians have traditionally been called upon to debunk myths. Myths are considered to be the antithesis of history – one being false, the other being true. In fact, as Beverly Southgate writes, the identification of myths and "myth-breaking" which is followed by the replacement of myth with facts is considered to be one of the primary purposes of the study of history by historians and students.[59] However, as Laura Cruz and Willem Frijhoff have pointed out, there has been a shift in which historians have increasingly gone from debunking myths to myths becoming "an object of study in and of themselves." Historians are now treating myths as a complex discursive form that does not easily fall into simplistic opposites, as had previously been the case. Myths are not always called out for being fiction.[60]

In Slotkin's description, myths are the culmination of narratives taken from the history of a group, collective, or society that through constant repetition has been given the symbolic power to represent that society's ideology and moral consciousness. A myth communicates ideology through its literary features that discount logic and rationality, and is instead based on metaphors and literary traditions and structures. Over time, the original myth is reduced to abstract symbols and icons that have entrenched themselves in society. Slotkin writes,

> Each of these mythic icons is in effect a poetic construction of tremendous economy and compression and a mnemonic device capable of evoking a complex system of historical associations by a single image or phrase. For an American, allusions to "the Frontier," or to events like "Pearl Harbor," "The Alamo," or "Custer's Last Stand" evoke an implicit understanding of the entire historical scenario that belongs to the event and of the complex interpretive tradition that has developed around it.

Myths provide a framework for how reality should be understood, explained, and contextualized. They are formed as a tool to explain problems that have appeared in the history of a specific society and to provide the individual or collective invoking myths a new way of handling the new crisis that has occurred. Myths can change as new conflicts and crises emerge, in particularly during times when the society's underlying ideology undergoes change. A myth is therefore not static and can be revised as required through the encounter of new ex-

59 Beverly Southgate, *What Is History For?* (London: Routledge, 2005), 40–49.
60 Laura Cruz and Willem Frijhoff, "Introduction: Myth in History, History in Myth," in *Myth in History, History in Myth*, ed. Laura Cruz and Willem Frijhoff (Leiden: BRILL, 2009), 1–12.

periences that deny the validity of the myth. "Although myths are the product of human thought and labor," Slotkin writes, "their identification with venerable tradition makes them appear to be products of 'nature' rather than history—expressions of a trans-historical consciousness or of some form of 'natural law.'"[61] Aronsson posits that the narratives that we openly call mythic are those who have lost their symbolic power and are therefore considered fiction. The real myths, Aronsson argues, are those that are not questioned and that achieves the act of appearing as a valid and authoritative interpretation of the past with the capability of competing with scholarly interpretations.[62]

A mythic space, in turn, is described by Slotkin as "a pseudo-historical (or pseudo-real) setting that is powerfully associated with stories and concerns rooted in the culture's myth/ideological tradition." In its essence, a mythic space becomes the landscape for specific myths in their most abstract form of icons and symbols. The term "pseudo-historical/pseudo-real" is particularly important in this context, since a mythic space displaces the "real" physical space that is being evoked to the point where the "real" space is "known through, and completely identified with, the fictions created about it." It is in this new, fictional space that new myths are crafted and reinforced, consequently disestablishing the contemporary or historical settings that the myth originally drew on and surpassing it in importance as a point of reference.[63] Slotkin and other scholars using the framework of mythic spaces have focused on physical and real landscapes and the mythic narratives associated with them. In this capacity, the term mythic space encompasses a broader spectrum of meanings, activities, and allusions that are acted out within that space, and that has its own rules and conventions. For Slotkin, mythic spaces are ultimately "a metaphor for history" and the "heroes" in the popular representations of the subject of his investigation, the American Frontier, "represent models of possible historical action."[64]

A white mythic space is not as concerned by the landscape it is framed around. Unlike Slotkin's definition, the "original" space in a white mythic space can be both a real physical landscape or a fictional landscape that has been constructed from real contemporary or historical analogues. The setting is of secondary importance because a white mythic space is more concerned with who populates the landscape. Race becomes the primary category of analysis. The basic definition of a white mythic space is a pseudo-historical or fiction-

61 Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 5 – 8.
62 Aronsson, *Historiebruk*, 88 – 89.
63 Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 61 – 62, 234 – 235.
64 Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 88.

al space that has been reimagined and transformed into a racially homogenous space in which non-white elements have been erased or minimized. This white mythic space is consequently perceived as an authentic and legitimate representation of the past or the fictional setting. It is a distortion of an already fictionalized space in favor of white hegemony and in stark opposition to reality, whether manifested in scholarly historical research or in the intentions of the original creators of the fictional universe. Through the repetition and enforcement of a white mythic space, whiteness becomes the principal expectation. Racial homogeneity grants the white mythic space its legitimacy amongst its proponents who see in it a collective identity, steeped in the notion that white representation is the only valid form of representation and that it should always be at the forefront. With this mindset, a white presence should never be questioned. Whiteness becomes the default mode of being.

As a result of these different factors, white mythic spaces become models of authenticity. In similarity to how mythic spaces displace real landscapes, white mythic spaces disestablish past ideas of authenticity to create a new standard. Like all myths, this requires the simplification of complex and often times disputed narratives into abstract icons and symbols. In the case of a white mythic space, it is fixed in the visual markers of whiteness that signify authenticity. Aronsson calls this phenomena the "mythic usage of the authentic" that bridges the physical gap between the present reality and a different reality, such as the past. The notion of an "authentic connection" to a space is complex and the reasons why people feel connected to something they were never apart of by being in a landscape, handling an object, or seeing a representation varies.[65] In the realm of a white mythic space, what bridges that gap are white physical bodies. The absence of white physical bodies breaks the authentic connection and renders the representative space as false. The continuity of whiteness provides legitimacy and consequently legitimates the white collective identity that has been crafted and reinforced by the white mythic space. This becomes evidence of a tradition that goes further back in time and makes white mythic spaces appear, in the words of Slotkin, as products of "nature". Indisputable white hegemony becomes fact. If one of the purposes of myths is to provide explanations then white mythic spaces explain who belongs in what space and that race is important in determining authenticity.

The white mythic space is a form of white supremacy. It works with the assumption that people of color, in particularly people of African ancestry, do not belong in white spaces. If they are present in white spaces, people of color are

65 Aronsson, *Historiebruk*, 112–116.

assigned places that they need to conform to within that space. The roles that people of color are given are always secondary and inferior to white roles. Non-white voices, actions, bodies, and agencies are actively rejected or erased. Their past presence is considered trivial or an impossibility, turning white mythic spaces into spaces of collective amnesia that reinforce its central tenets. Racial discrimination becomes important in order to control and separate non-white bodies from white spaces. The creation of separate, racial spheres into what amounts as racial segregation is justified by ideas of authenticity and hegemony. People of color are forced to legitimize their presence in supposedly white spaces with no guarantee that their rightful claims will be considered or even heard in a white hegemonic space. Racism is in the very foundation of white mythic spaces and is an essential factor to consider when investigating them.

The racist underpinnings of white mythic spaces can be visualized in a First World War memorial located in Havre de Grace, Maryland (Figure 1.1). At first glance, this 1919 memorial for American soldiers from the local community who served in the First World War appears identical to many others like it that are scattered across villages and towns in Europe, Africa, and North America. Flanked by the dates 1917 and 1918, the top of the memorial has an inscription that explains that the memorial was "erected by the citizens of Havre-de-Grace as an expression of gratitude to those of this community who served in the Great World War." Underneath it is an honor roll with the names of soldiers, organized according to rank. The fallen soldiers, those "who made the ultimate sacrifice," are given a separate section beneath it. At the very bottom of the memorial, beneath the honor roll and the fallen, is an additional section, simply titled "Colored Troops". Containing the names of 43 African American soldiers, their names appear listed almost as an afterthought. Symbolically, they are inscribed at the very bottom of the social order, below even the dead. In segregationist Maryland, at the height of the Jim Crow era, this was the appropriate place for African Americans in the racial hierarchy. White soldiers are described as honorable, by an attribute, and with their race and position in the social order unmentioned and unquestioned, while the black soldiers are defined simply by their race which has consequently left them at the bottom. While the memorial states beneath all the names that "lest we forget their valiant deeds", one cannot help to wonder who the "we" in the statement actually includes. Are the "valiant deeds" of African Americans really remembered? When the memorial was rededicated in 2017, the centennial of the entry of the United States into the war, the memorial's importance as being the first one to acknowledge African American soldiers in Maryland was emphasized, but there was no mention of the racial segregation inherent in the design of the memorial nor of the racial abuse

1917·THIS MEMORIAL·1918
ERECTED BY THE CITIZENS OF HAVRE·DE·GRACE
AS AN EXPRESSION OF GRATITUDE TO THOSE
OF THIS COMMUNITY WHO SERVED THEIR
COUNTRY IN THE GREAT WORLD WAR
HONOR ROLL
THESE MADE THE SUPREME SACRIFICE
COLORED TROOPS
LEST WE FORGET THEIR VALIANT DEEDS
1919

Figure 1.1: First World War memorial in Havre de Grace, Maryland.

and discrimination faced by African American troops during the war.[66] Although grounded in a specific historical context, the memorial is a good example of how

66 David Anderson, "Havre de Grace remembers its men who served in World War I," *The Baltimore Sun*, April 7, 2017, https://www.baltimoresun.com/maryland/harford/aegis/ph-ag-war-memorial-ceremony-0407-20170407-story.html.

the white mythic space can be visualized in practice and how it is defined by a historical continuity of whiteness, segregation, and white supremacy. It also functions as a reminder that history is not only in the past, but also very much in the present.

As defined by Michael Omi and Howard Winant, race "is a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies."[67] The idea that race is first and foremost a biological idea with universal and essentialized definitions is wrong. Race is not, and never has been, a fixed idea. How people have been identified as belonging to a specific race and how their supposed race has been distinguished from other races is part of a larger complex social, cultural, and historical process that has seen different races being defined by various sets of selective characteristics during different time periods in different places. Historical understandings of race will therefore be different from contemporary understandings of race. Omi and Winant argue that there is no real biological basis for defining human beings in accordance with race, and that the categorizations used to distinguish races are, "at best imprecise, and at worst completely arbitrary."[68] In racist thought, however, "biologism" is a common way in which to understand racial difference. Lawrence Blum identifies five forms of racial biologism: bodily characteristics (often referred to as "phenotypes"), genetic characteristics, psychological characteristics, ancestry (inherited racialization), and "being regarded and treated as a group (erroneously) thought to possess biological characteristics of any of the aforementioned types." As Blum writes, the different forms have all been called upon at different times and in different combinations as evidence for the inferiority of certain racialized groups.[69] The belief in the biological inferiority of certain races has declined, but has instead been gradually replaced in some cases by an increase in what Blum calls "culturalism" (or "cultural racism"), which considers an often essentialized conception of culture as a point of racial difference as opposed to biology. Blum identifies four forms of culturalism: essentialist/inherentist culturalism (attributing "cultural characteristics to traditionally defined racial groups almost as if those characteristics were inherent in the groups' nature"); non-inherentist/malleable culturalism (Blum points to a specific racist variant within this form, described as "group responsible for its culture", which blames the racialized group for the consequences of racial in-

67 Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 55.

68 Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation*, 55.

69 Lawrence Blum, "'Cultural Racism': Biology and Culture in Racist Thought," *Journal of Social Philosophy* (2020): 1–3.

justice as a result of their own culture); colonialist culturalism (demeaning groups as "uncivilized" or "savage"); and neo-racism (the characterization of cultures as incompatible to a supposedly superior culture). All of these forms, Blum argues, "supply ideological rationales for white domination, racial injustice, or illegitimate white advantage."[70] The ideological rationale for white mythic spaces can be found in both racial biologism and culturalism that looks to marginalize and dehumanize people of color. Many of the adherents of white mythic spaces will not openly embrace arguments that explicitly talk of deficiencies in biology or culture in people of color. Nonetheless, the strong fixation on visual markers of race in the form of bodily characteristics, in particular of skin color, shows the importance of racial biologism to white mythic spaces. This, as Blum writes, belongs to the traditional racist thoughts of Segregationists in the United States. The racist discourse used to reject people of color in defense of white mythic spaces is also grounded in a contemporary culturalism, for example in the notion that the history or presence of a certain racialized group is not compatible with, or does not belong in, supposedly white spaces. "[European] Neo-racism," Blum writes, "presumes that the targeted groups are being viewed racially, and that everyone knows this, even if the language (or even substance) of "culture" is employed to characterize them. They are (regarded as) nonwhite."[71] This in turn is connected to the idea that whiteness, and thus white society and culture, is superior and therefore takes a precedence over supposedly inferior and incompatible cultures. Whiteness becomes prioritized and justified.

"Racism," Olivette Otele writes, grounded in Marianne Hirsch's theoretical term postmemory, "is an intergenerational process, transmitted as a legacy of the past."[72] In its very essence, racism is about exclusion. Racism, as a word and as a concept, is viewed in a negative light in discussions where the white mythic space is defended and reinforced, and there are those who will actively avow any form of prejudice or of being racists in order to legitimize their arguments. Consequently, racism is disowned in favor of other means of considering or not considering race at all. This stance of postracialism can be deeply troubling when given a closer examination. David Theo Goldberg argues that antiracialism ("not seeing race" or colorblindness), as opposed to antiracism, works in favor of whiteness and the status quo – not against it. While antiracism "requires historical memory, recalling the conditions of racial degradation and relating contemporary to historical and local to global conditions," antiracialism, accord-

70 Blum, "Cultural Racism," 3–15.

71 Blum, "Cultural Racism," 12.

72 Olivette Otele, *African Europeans: An Untold History* (Hurst & Company: London, 2020), 179.

ing to Goldberg, "suggests forgetting, getting over, moving on, wiping away the terms of reference, at best (or worst) a commercial memorializing rather than a recounting and redressing of the terms of humiliation and devaluation," further adding that "antiracialism seeks to wipe out the terms of reference, to wipe away the very vocabulary necessary to recall and recollect, to make a case, to make a claim."[73] Omi and Winant emphasize that instead of falling into notions of antiracialism, it is productive to acknowledge that the concept of race "continues to play a fundamental role in structuring and representing the social world," concluding (in agreement with Goldberg) that to attempt "to banish the concept as an archaism is at best counterintuitive."[74] While explicitly repudiating any notion of being racist, supporters of white mythic spaces use antiracialism as a shield through which they can call for racial segregation in disguised terms, such as authenticity which is used to rationalize white hegemony. Yet by doing so, they inadvertently reveal the centrality of race to their understanding of personal identity and of the social world they inhibit. Whether its supporters are conscious or unconscious of the fact, racialization is at the core of the white mythic space.

What are the origins of white mythic spaces? Finding the answer to that question is not a simple task and reveals the complexity behind the construction of individual white mythic spaces. Unlike mythic spaces in Slotkin's definition, white mythic spaces are built upon pre-existing pseudo-historical or fictional spaces. This layering adds an additional dimension of distortion that distances the white mythic space even further from notions of reality and "truth". The source of a white mythic space will vary and will need to be considered on a case by case basis. In the case of historical white mythic spaces, the origins can often be found in a combination of historical memory, historiography, myths, and popular culture. As argued in the previous section, historical memory can be used to exclude or distort the presence of minorities who are not considered to belong in the constructed collective history. Yet there is a plurality in historical memory that cannot be found in white mythic spaces. Unlike historical memory, a white mythic space does not have competing white mythical spaces that allows people of color a major and meaningful presence. While historical memories can change over time and find themselves being challenged, white mythic spaces are fixed in their ideas. A white mythic space is not revised, it is defended and reinforced. White hegemony in depictions of historical events

73 David Theo Goldberg, *The Threat of Race: Reflections on Racial Neoliberalism* (Wiley-Blackwell: Malden, 2009), 21.

74 Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation*, 55.

in popular culture has a large impact in how white mythic spaces are crafted and consequently reinforced.

The feud between film directors Spike Lee and Clint Eastwood over the African American participation in the Battle of Iwo Jima during the Second World War serves as an example of this impact. At the Cannes Film Festival in 2008, Lee criticized Eastwood's film, *Flags of Our Fathers* (2006), for its lack of black representation. Lee argued that Eastwood "did two films about Iwo Jima back to back and there was not one black soldier in both of those films," adding that, "In his vision of Iwo Jima, Negro soldiers did not exist."[75] At the time, Lee was promoting his own film about the Second World War, *Miracle at St. Anna* (2008), that followed black soldiers from the segregated 92nd Infantry Division. It was his response to the white mythic space of the Second World War in Hollywood, pushing back against the exclusion of black representation in what had traditionally been a white continuity of war films made after 1945. Lee was not the first person to make this observation about *Flags of Our Fathers*. African American veterans of the Second World War were the first to speak up against the possibility of exclusion while the film was in production. Sergeant Thomas McPhatter, an African American veteran of the war who fought at Iwo Jima, stated that he "wrote Clint Eastwood an email asking him not to commit the offense so many others had. There are five major movies already about Iwo Jima and none of them reflected the black participation in a favorable way on any part of Iwo Jima."[76] After the release of the film, Sgt. McPhatter expressed his frustration: "This is the last straw. I feel like I've been denied, I've been insulted, I've been mistreated. But what can you do? We still have a strong underlying force in my country of rabid racism."[77] The demands for revision, some of them coming from actual participants in the historical events depicted, were rejected by Eastwood who questioned if Lee really knew history. Although admitting to the presence of African Americans during the battle, Eastwood proceeds to defend the absence of proper representation for black soldiers by misconstruing Lee's comments as if Lee had implied that Eastwood should have depicted a black soldier raising the second flag on Iwo Jima. "If I go ahead and put an African-American actor in there, people'd go, 'This guy's lost his mind.' I mean, it's not accurate," Eastwood stated, explaining that in terms of depicting history, "I'm playing it the

75 Sheila Marikar, "Spike Strikes Back: Clint's 'an Angry Old Man'," *ABC News*, June 13, 2008, https://abcnews.go.com/Entertainment/story?id=5015524&page=1.

76 Cheryl Corley, "Black Veteran Takes Issue with Eastwood's Films," *NPR*, June 18, 2008, https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=91633169.

77 Dan Glaister, "Where have all the black soldiers gone?," *The Guardian*, October 21, 2006, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/oct/21/usa.filmnews.

way I read it historically, and that's the way it is." Eastwood ultimately added that Lee should "shut his mouth."[78] The rejection and marginalization of people of color is typical of the tactics used by the adherents of white mythic spaces, as we will explore more in detail in the next chapter. What is revealing about the Eastwood/Lee feud is how Eastwood feels the need to silence and mock black voices rather than directly confront them, resorting to allusions to historical accuracy and "the way I read it historically." While Lee and others are specifically criticizing the absence of past representations of black soldiers in cinema ("I know the history of Hollywood and its omission of the one million African-American men and women who contributed to World War II"), emphasizing the importance of real representation in order to provide a more historically accurate depiction, Eastwood reinforces the white mythic space by invoking a white hegemonic history that, despite his own admission that black soldiers were present, sidelines minority representation. Actual history is replaced by a history that is more in accordance with Eastwood's own expectations, anchored in past representations of the battle of Iwo Jima and his own selective reading on the topic, including the popular history book *Flags of Our Fathers* (2000) that the film was based on. For Eastwood, calls for black representation in a cinematic Second World War becomes an attempt to rewrite white history and erase white representation. The white mythic space of the Second World War is consequently reinforced, both by the film and by Eastwood's authoritative and confident words that legitimize the depiction of the film. Ultimately, Lee gave Eastwood an offer: "If he wishes, I could assemble African-American men who fought at Iwo Jima and I'd like him to tell these guys that what they did was insignificant and they did not exist."[79]

Finding the origins of white mythic spaces that are based on speculative fiction and tied to genres like high fantasy or science fiction has become progressively easier due to the increase in scholarship surrounding how whiteness became the default setting in speculative fiction. Helen Young and Paul B. Sturtevant have written enlightening studies on how race is constructed, perceived, and imagined in fantasy, and how these constructions are influenced

78 Jeff Dawson, "Dirty Harry comes clean," *The Guardian*, June 6, 2008, https://www.theguardian.com/film/2008/jun/06/1.

79 Sheila Marikar, "Spike Strikes Back: Clint's 'an Angry Old Man'," *ABC News*, June 13, 2008, https://abcnews.go.com/Entertainment/story?id=5015524&page=1. There are scenes in *Flags of Our Fathers* where black soldiers are depicted, but they are so brief that one could easily miss them, which is likely what Lee did. It is not, however, the favorable or meaningful representation that Sgt. McPhatter called for. Relegated to being background extras, Eastwood seemed to have no knowledge of their presence in his interview with *The Guardian*.

by real life and historical analogues that are all anchored in a concept of whiteness.[80] John Reider and Isiah Lavender III have examined similar themes within the context of science fiction.[81] Similar to historical white mythic spaces, fictional white mythic space are reinforced and strengthened by past representations that become parameters of authenticity. The incredibly popular Marvel Cinematic Universe, based on the characters from Marvel Comics, can serve as our example. *Thor* (2011) and *Thor: Ragnarok* (2017) attracted ire from parts of the fan community who objected to the casting of black actors as Heimdall (played by Idris Elba) and Valkyrie (played by Tessa Thompson), both traditionally depicted as white in the source material. The films are based on the *Thor* comic books (1962–present), which in turn draw inspiration from Norse mythology. In the comic books and films, characters drawn from Norse mythology are depicted not as actual Norse Gods and Goddesses but as extraterrestrials in a fantasy/science fiction-style crossover. The backlash that followed the announcement of the castings focused not only on the established canon in the comics, but also on Norse mythology itself. Centered around the argument that "Norse deities are not of an African ethnicity!" as one individual complained, the argument associates nineteenth and twentieth century romantic nationalist depictions of Vikings and Norse gods that served as the foundation for the visual aesthetics of the comic books as an authentic representation of both. That Heimdall and Valkyrie are Asgardians, a fictional race of extraterrestrials and therefore not Scandinavians (nor actually Norse deities), is ignored in favor of a continuation of white hegemony.[82] This is not solely reserved for fictional alien Vikings. The casting of Zendaya Coleman as a reimagined Mary Jane Watson (named Michelle Jones) for *Spider-Man: Homecoming* (2017) also attracted ire, based only on the white continuation of the original fictional character.[83]

80 Helen Young, *Race and Popular Fantasy Literature: Habits of Whiteness* (New York: Routledge, 2016). Paul B. Sturtevant, *The Middle Ages in Popular Imagination: Memory, Film and Medievalism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018).

81 John Reider, *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2008); Isiah Lavender III, *Race in American Science Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011).

82 Sam Jones, "Idris Elba defends Thor film role," *The Guardian*, April 27, 2010, https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2010/apr/27/idris-elba-thor-race-debate; Tommy Cook, "Tessa Thompson on Redefining Valkyrie in 'Thor: Ragnarok'," *Collider*, September 12, 2017, https://collider.com/thor-ragnarok-tessa-thompson-interview/.

83 Adam Howard, "'Spider-Man' Casting Controversy Revives Racial Tensions," *NBC News*, August 24, 2017, https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/spider-man-casting-controversy-revives-racial-tensions-n637111.

The theory of the white mythic space is related to other, similar theories that analyze memory or representations of race. These are worth exploring in order to broaden the scope of the white mythic space and provide the reader with complimentary tools that can be used in their analysis.

Between 1984 and 1992, historian Pierre Nora released the highly ambitious and influential *Les Lieux de mémoire*, a work in seven volumes that theorized about the subject of memory, the present, and its relation to the past. Although Nora wrote in the specific context of France in the late twentieth century, and specifically about the historical national memory of France, the theory still remains a relevant and applicable term to studies of the symbols and sites of memory and history. In Nora's own attempt at creating an official definition of *lieu de mémoire* (site of memory), he defined it as "any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community (in this case, the French community)."[84] The sites of memory originates from what Nora characterized as an anxiety and fear in the late twentieth century over losing touch with the past which subsequently, "by a play of history and memory", created sites of memory that reflect a specific will to remember the shared past. This memory, however, does not preserve history. It creates illusions of history through the crystallization of collective memory. Sites of memory "have no referent in reality; or, rather, they are their own referent: pure, exclusively self-referential signs."[85]

As with many other scholarly theories, Nora's concept of sites of memory is complex and difficult to succinctly summarize (in particularly since it took almost a decade for Nora to elaborate on its application). Debates still rage over the weaknesses and strengths of the theory, especially its national focus, but its influence is still present, in particularly surrounding its discussion of history and memory as being in opposition – a concept scholars take for granted today. Relevant to the discussion of white mythic spaces is the notion of sites (spaces) of memory being self-referential, only referring to other sites of memory instead of the past. In similarity to sites of memory, white mythic spaces are also self-referential, seeking not to refer to history but rather to historical memory, past rep-

84 The term *lieu de mémoire* has as many translations as it has uses. In English, "realm of memory," "site of memory," and "place of memory" remain the most commonly used translations. Pierre Nora, "From *Lieux de memoire* to Realms of Memory," in *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past*, ed. Pierre Nora and Lawrence D. Kritzman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), xv–xvii.

85 Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*," *Representations* 26 (1989): 7–24.

resentations of whiteness, and other white mythic spaces that it improves and builds upon. It becomes a space where white memory "crystallizes and secretes itself" as Nora would describe it.[86]

A researcher within the field of game studies who has looked into the absence of black representation in virtual fantasy worlds like those in the massive multiplayer online role-playing games *EverQuest* (1999–present), *EverQuest II* (2004–present), and *World of Warcraft* (2004– present) is Tanner Higgin. Higgin theorizes about what he calls the blackless fantasy. How does one explain the gradual disappearance of non-white representation in fantasy video games? In the aforementioned games, European culture and bodies are privileged. Here, Higgin, like myself and other scholars, points towards the Eurocentric roots of genres like high fantasy and that the games "follow established norms and expectations of the genre that have been present since its very inception." Although these games feature a diverse array of non-human races (which, steeped in fantasy traditions, can reflect racist stereotypes), the humans in the games are white. As Higgin argues, "when one sees a race called 'human' within a MMORPG and it is westernized as well as White with different shades of color for diversity (but nothing *too Black*), a powerful assertion is made. This assertion is that humanity will only be understood within the fantasy world if it is primarily coded White." In addition to this aspect, Higgin argues that gamers have racialized and hypermasculine conceptions of male, black bodies, pointing out that in video games, almost "all leading Black men are sports players or gun-toting gangstas, and Black women are completely invisible. Blackness, as it is culturally rehearsed within games, does not fit into the heroic world of the MMORPG."[87] The consequence of this is that black men are not seen as suitable to be fantasy heroes.

Higgin was writing in the context of the late 2000s and as I point out in the introduction, a couple of years can make a lot of difference. Since 2009, there has been an increase in black representation in video games and in other media related to speculative fiction, but the issues of proper representation and preconceived ideas about black bodies still remain. The critical media scholar Ebony Elizabeth Thomas has looked closer at these pre-conceptions within the context of young adult speculative fiction and has theorized around a notion that she calls the dark fantastic. The central claim that Thomas makes about the dark fantastic is that in

86 Nora, "Between Memory and History," 7.

87 Tanner Higgin, "Blackless Fantasy: The Disappearance of Race in Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games," *Games and Culture* 4, no. 1 (2009): 3–23.

> the Anglo-American fantastic tradition, the Dark Other is the spectacle, the monstrous Thing that is the root cause of *hesitation*, *ambivalence*, and the *uncanny*. The Dark Other is the present-absence that lingers at the edges of every fairy tale. She stalks the shadows of the futurist visions of science fiction, lurks along the margins of the imagined magical pasts of high fantasy, and renders the uchronia of alternate history into a nonsensical cipher. [...] readers and hearers of fantastic tales who have been endarkened and Othered by the dominant culture can never be plausible conquering heroes nor prizes to be won in the fantastic. [...] the implicit message that readers, hearers, and viewers of color receive as they read these texts is that *we are the villains. We are the horde. We are the enemies. We are the monsters.*[88]

Like Higgin, Thomas argues that black bodies are not viewed as heroic as a consequence of traditions rooted in the eurocentrism of high fantasy and science fiction. Thomas elaborates on this concept by focusing on what this actually does to the imagination and the self-image of people of color. You are the very obstacle that the heroes in the books are fighting against and that they ultimately violently defeat. Thomas introduces the dark fantastic cycle that talks of the pattern of how black bodies, or the Dark Other, are portrayed in the texts that she has investigated. Without the Dark Other, Thomas writes, there is no story. The Dark Other is the antagonist that all speculative fiction requires. It creates the dilemma, drives the story forward, requires to be vanquished yet can never fully be destroyed. The only way to stop the cycle is through the transformation of the objectified Dark Other to a Dark One, a subject with an agency. Furthermore, if you as a person of color are present in any other role in a fantasy story, you are marginalized and not the center of the story. As Thomas writes, "To watch a science fiction film is to learn that you have no future – there are only two or three people of color on most spaceships."[89]

Particularly important for Thomas and Higgin's theories is the need for meaningful representations of people of color. Both scholars theorize about the transformation of people of color into something that is the very opposite of humanity and heroism, represented as white, that not only denies them agency but turns them into monsters, into non-humans. The separation of race into different spaces is an important feature of the white mythic space and it finds common ground in the theoretic discussions surrounding the blackless fantasy

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88 Ebony Elizabeth Thomas, *The Dark Fantastic: Race and the Imagination from Harry Potter to the Hunger Games* (New York: NYU Press, 2019), 23. A summary of the theoretic discussion can be found in Ebony Elizabeth Thomas, "Toward a Theory of the Dark Fantastic: The Role of Racial Difference in Young Adult Speculative Fiction and Media," *Journal of Language and Literacy Education* 14, no. 1 (2018): 1–10.

89 Thomas, *The Dark Fantastic*, 24.

and the dark fantastic. In all three theories, people of color are relegated to specific roles within the heroic white space, roles that reject their claim of agency and humanity. Furthermore, all three theories present similar but different ideas surrounding the absence, rejection, or marginalized inclusion of people of color in speculative fiction. They are companions in a mutual struggle.

The theory of the white mythic space is shaped by my own training as an historian and closely tied to the concept of historical memory, a memory which shapes all cultural productions created by human beings – even those seemingly based on the most fantastical imagination thought possible. For this reason, it is a broad theory, a theory that is meant to be used beyond one specific type of media and covering both non-fiction and speculative fiction alike. The possibilities for which the theory can be used for in analyzing perceptions and receptions of race is limited only by the researcher's own imagination. As I have attempted to show in this section, it can be used for more than the analysis of video games set during the First World War. Films, television shows, comic books, novels, artworks, and theatre plays are only some of the places where the theory can be applied and used. Every white mythic space will be different, based on its own specific history and context. Wherever the presence of people of color is questioned or rejected is where you will find a white mythic space. It is also there that it can be destroyed. First and foremost, the theory of the white mythic space is an antiracist theory. It seeks to explain the ideological rationales behind the rejection of people of color from supposedly white spaces by linking this form of contemporary racism to historical racism and beyond. Our focus should not only be on the perpetrators but it should also consider those effected by the white mythic space. The theory does not forget that there are real human beings behind the pixels, the letters, or the screens who are being discriminated against and whose presence is being denied simply on the basis of their race. Furthermore, the theory does more than explain. It seeks to confront the racism that is at the core of white mythic spaces and to expose the anatomy of the exclusionary arguments. Therefore, the theory of the white mythic space is also a call to challenge racism and invites the scholar, the student, the teacher, or anyone else to apply the theory to what they might encounter online or in any cultural space where people of color are actively excluded from for no other reason than a continuity of whiteness in representation. Said continuity will more often than not be an erroneous representation that is built upon distortions that go back decades if not centuries in some cases. The way it can be exposed as a lie is through challenging it and breaking down the arguments to explain what lies behind them. Application of the theory requires the recounting of experiences and stories of people of color from the past and present in order to reclaim spaces where their presence has been erased

or minimized and to discuss individual and institutional racism. We should not remain passive and silent when confronted with the multitude of comments that are submitted online every day that question or outright deny the presence of people of color in a variety of spaces. By understanding the white mythic space, we can understand how to fight it.

The Great War in Color

Not far from Norman and Roy Manley on the Western Front was another black British soldier, Arthur Roberts. Born in Bristol and raised in Glasgow, Roberts enlisted in the 3rd Battalion, King's Own Scottish Borderers in February 1917 before transferring to the 2nd Battalion, Royal Scots Fusiliers a few months later. Roberts was 20 years old when he experienced the full ferocity of the Battle of Pilckem Ridge, part of the greater Third Battle of Ypres. His wartime diary, which was rediscovered in an attic almost a 100 years after the battle, tells us of the powerful impact that experiencing battle had on the young man: "Tuesday 31 July 1917: We were over this morning and I saw sights that I never saw before or wish to see again. It was terrible yet it was wonderful. I will not attempt to describe the sights, sounds and feelings that I saw, heard and felt because it would be impossible. I got through without a scratch."[90]

Roberts and the Manley brothers were far from the only people of color serving on the Western Front in 1917. More than a million people of color served on or behind the battlefields in Europe, and millions more served on battlefields in Africa and Asia. They did not only serve as infantrymen. They served as cavalrymen, fighting both dismounted and on horseback. They flew in the skies above the battlefields. They served onboard ships that traversed the oceans in search of the enemy or transporting supplies and soldiers from one continent to another. They drove the newly invented tanks and operated artillery pieces. There were many more who served behind the lines. They served as laborers, stocking ammunition, repairing tanks, building trenches, and burying the dead. They served as stevedores, unloading supplies from ships that made the large offensives possible. They served as stretcher bearers and ambulance drivers who took the wounded off the battlefields. They served as doctors and nurses who tended to the wounded soldiers in clearing stations or hospitals a long way from the front. On the home front, they worked in factories and in other in-

90 Morag Miller et al., *As Good As Any Man: Scotland's Black Tommy* (Stroud: The History Press, 2014), 9–77.

dustries crucial to the war efforts. They waited for their loved ones to return home from the war, mourned their deaths, and kept their memories alive in the decades that followed. At the end of the war, delegates from all over the world attended the Paris Peace Conference. The resulting Versailles Peace Treaty was signed by representatives from India, Liberia, Haiti, China, and other nations in addition to the principal Entente powers.[91] There was no space, from the soldier on the ground to the politicians at the top, where you would not find a person of color during the First World War.

Where did they all come from? The majority of the great European powers involved in the war were colonial and imperial powers, in possession of both large and small swathes of territory across the world that had been forcibly taken through a variety of means from the peoples who still inhabited it. As one empire after another entered the war, their overseas colonies and territories followed.

As Germany invaded Belgium in the summer of 1914, their overseas colonies in Africa and the Pacific found themselves drawn into the war. Within a short time, soldiers from Kamerun (Cameroon), Togoland (Togo), German East Africa (Tanzania, Rwanda, and Burundi), and German South West Africa (Namibia) faced off with Entente forces. German concessions in China, including Qingdao that was besieged by an Anglo-Japanese force in 1914, were swiftly involved in the war alongside the islands of German New Guinea and German Samoa that were occupied shortly into the war.[92] Belgium in turn involved its only African colony, Belgian Congo (Democratic Republic of the Congo), in the conflict as it joined other Entente powers in fighting Germany on the African continent.[93]

When German forces reached France in 1914, they would have encountered soldiers from French North Africa (Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia) and French West Africa (Senegal, Burkina Faso, Niger, Gambia, Mali, Benin, Ivory Coast, Guinea, and Mauritania). Madagascar would also be involved, in addition to French Somaliland (Djibouti) and French Equatorial Africa (The Republic of the Congo, Gabon, Chad, and the Central African Republic). France also drew soldiers of color from French Indochina (Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia) and

91 For a non-specialist and beginner friendly introduction into the participation of people of color in the First World War, see David Olusoga, *The World's War: Forgotten Soldiers of Empire* (London: Head of Zeus, 2014).

92 Heather Jones, "The German Empire," in *Empires at War: 1911–1923*, ed. Robert Gerwarth and Erez Manela (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 52–72.

93 Hew Strachan, *The First World War in Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 112–114.

as far away as New Caledonia and French Polynesia, two of several French territories in the area.[94]

Great Britain's entry into the world meant the mobilization of its large empire. Soldiers of color came from British India (consisting of modern day India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Burma, in addition to soldiers recruited from Nepal), the Caribbean islands of the British West Indies (including Jamaica, Bermuda, Trinidad and Tobago, the Bahamas, and several others) as well as British Guiana (Guyana) and British Honduras (Belize). Even more soldiers were mobilized in Britain's colonies in Africa: The Gold Coast (Ghana), the Gambia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, British East Africa (Kenya), Uganda, Northern Rhodesia (Zambia), Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), Nyasaland (Malawi), Bechuanaland (Botswana), South Africa, Egypt, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan (Sudan and South Sudan), and British Somaliland (part of modern day Somalia). In addition to these, the indigenous peoples of Canada and Newfoundland, New Zealand, and Australia also served in British uniform.[95]

The Portuguese Empire, albeit considerably smaller than what it had once been hundreds of years earlier, joined the Entente powers in both Europe and in Africa to fight against Germany. In Africa, Portugal called upon their colonial subjects in Mozambique, Angola, and Guinea (Guinea-Bissau) to fight alongside France, Great Britain, and Belgium, and to support them.[96] The Italian Empire also called upon its African colonies. Italian Somaliland (part of modern day Somalia), Libya, and Eritrea were all affected by the war and in the case of Libya this saw outright rebellion against Italian rule, supported by Germany and the Ottoman Empire. Despite this, 2,700 Libyan soldiers were shipped from Libya to Sicily in August 1915 with the intention of being used to fight Germany, but they never reached the frontline.[97] The United States of America, in similarity to the European powers, also had overseas territories. Territories like Hawaii, Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and Guam were organized to contribute to the Amer-

94 Richard S. Fogerty, "The French Empire," in Gerwarth and Manela, *Empires at War*, 109 – 129; Adrian Muckle, "Kanak Experiences of WWI: New Caledonia's *Tirailleurs*, Auxiliaries and 'Rebels'," *History Compass* 6, no. 5 (2008): 1325 – 1345.

95 Bill Nasson, "British Imperial Africa," in Gerwarth and Manela, *Empires at War*, 130 – 151; Stephen Garton, "The Dominions, Ireland, and India," in Gerwarth and Manela, *Empires at War*, 152 – 178.

96 Filipe Ribeiro de Meneses, "The Portuguese Empire," in Gerwarth and Manela, *Empires at War*, 179 – 196.

97 Richard Bosworth and Giuseppe Finaldi, "The Italian Empire," in Gerwarth and Manela, *Empires at War*, 34 – 51; Christian Koller, "Nationalism and Racism in Franco-German Controversies about Colonial Soldiers," in *Identities and the First World War: Shifting Loyalties to the Fatherland*, ed. Nico Wouters and Laurence van Ypersele (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 215.

ican war effort, and the outbreak of the war even led to the acquisition of more territories, such as the U.S. Virgin Islands which was purchased from Denmark due to fears that Germany might conquer the islands.[98]

The Empire of Japan, the Republic of China, and the Kingdom of Siam (Thailand) expanded the Asian participation in the war through their direct involvement on the side of the Entente, seeking a role in a post-war world that would be shaped by the victors of the conflict.[99] Brazil, in similarity to the United States, also joined the war as a result of German U-boats sinking Brazilian merchant ships. The Brazilian Navy played a direct role in the hostilities after 1917 and preparations were made for Brazilian soldiers to be sent to the Western Front, but the war came to an end before this was accomplished.[100]

The First World War drew men and women of color from every corner of the world to the battlefields of Europe, but not all of them had to travel so far. The legacy of slavery, the ever-present factor of colonialism, trade, and immigration, meant that in the early 1910s, there were people of color living in Great Britain, France, and Germany who had been born there and whose family in some cases had lived there for generations. These were men and women who considered themselves citizens of the nations they were born and raised in. They knew no other home. Some were recent immigrants who had come to the centers of their empires to find work and a new life. Other individuals came to the metropoles as students, as well as traders, diplomats, sailors, entertainers, and of course, travelers.[101] As John Hobbis Harris, secretary of the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines' Protection Society, stated in 1919: "[W]e are a coloured empire [...] You cannot prevent the black man from coming here, because this is the centre of his Empire. You could no more tell him that he must not come to London, Liverpool, or Cardiff than he has the right to tell you that he must not go to Lagos or Durban

98 Chris Capozzola, "The United States Empire," in Gerwarth and Manela, *Empires at War*, 235–253.

99 Frederick R. Dickinson, "The Japanese Empire," in Gerwarth and Manela, *Empires at War*, 197–213; Xu Guoqi, "China and Empire," in Gerwarth and Manela, *Empires at War*, 214–234. See also Heather Streets-Salter, *World War One in Southeast Asia: Colonialism and Anticolonialism in an Era of Global Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

100 Robert L. Scheina, *Latin America's Wars: The Age of the Professional Soldier, 1900–2001* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, 2003), 35–40.

101 For a deeper exploration of the transnational and global connections with a focus on the African diaspora of the early twentieth century, see David Olusoga, *Black and British* (London: Macmillan 2016); Otele, *African Europeans*; Robbie Aitken and Eve Rosenhaft, *Black Germany: The Making and Unmaking of a Diaspora Community, 1884–1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Fassil Demissie, *African Diaspora and the Metropolis: Reading the African, African American and Caribbean Experience* (London: Routledge, 2010).

or Johannesburg."[102] In the case of people of African ancestry, the connections between Europe and Africa predates eighteenth and nineteenth century colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade. There has been a black presence in Europe going back as far as the third century AD, a fact that has been attested by archaeological evidence.[103] The presence of people of color in Europe in the early 1910s was therefore not a recent development. During the First World War, those who volunteered or were conscripted into European armies would soon be joined by racial minorities from North America. The United States Army was reflective of its vast population of immigrants, some of whom were people of color, such as Latinos and Asian Americans from India, Syria, and the Philippines. The legacies of slavery and imperialism in the United States was particularly present by the presence of indigenous peoples in its ranks and the large contingent of African Americans who served in American uniform.[104] As previously mentioned, the indigenous peoples of Canada also served as soldiers, and they were joined by black Canadians, Japanese Canadians, and other men of color who volunteered to fight for Canada and the British Empire.[105] In every sense of the word, the armies of the First World War were diverse multiracial and multicultural forces.

The presence of soldiers of color on the battlefields of Europe was not without controversy, however. The thought alone of allowing non-white soldiers to fight and kill white enemies was despicable to many in the imperial metropoles. Germany, who was unable to transport African troops from its colonies to Europe due to the naval blockade imposed on it, openly agitated against the deployment of colonial forces on European territory against white soldiers. Deeply racist official German propaganda claimed that the presence of non-white British and French colonial soldiers in Europe was against international law and alleged

102 Quoted in Olusoga, *Black and British*, 465.

103 See Olusoga, *Black and British*; Otele, *African Europeans*; Mischa Honeck, Martin Klimke, and Anne Kuhlman, *Germany and the Black Diaspora: Points of Contact, 1250–1914* (New York: Berghahn, 2013); S. Leach et al., "A Lady of York: migration, ethnicity and identity in Roman Britain," *Antiquity* 84 (2010): 131–145.

104 For more on the intersection of immigration, race, and national identity in the U.S. Army during the First World War, see Richard Slotkin, *Lost Battalions: The Great War and the Crisis of American Nationality* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2013). Michael W. Suleiman, "Early Arab-Americans: The Search for Identity," in *Crossing the Waters: Arabic-Speaking Immigrants to the United States Before 1940*, ed. Eric J. Hooglund (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1987), 37–54.

105 Lyle Dick, "Sergeant Masumi Mitsui and the Japanese Canadian War Memorial," *The Canadian Historical Review* 91, no. 3 (2010): 435–463; Melissa N. Shaw, "'Most Anxious to Serve their King and Country': Black Canadians' Fight to Enlist in WWI and Emerging Race Consciousness in Ontario, 1914–1919," *Histoire sociale/Social history* 50, no. 100 (2016): 543–580.

that colonial troops committed atrocities such as human trophy hunting.[106] Despite official propaganda, men of African ancestry could be found in German uniform throughout the war. This contradiction was not reserved for Germany alone. There were debates raging before and during the war about the use of non-white combatants in Europe, centered around the belief that allowing soldiers of color to kill white soldiers could cause irreversible harm to white supremacy and the important racial hierarchy that was one of the central tenants of European colonialism, which in turn might create demands for equality or even revolt against their colonial masters. The actual deployment of colonial troops therefore took different, contradictory forms. France, for example, did not hesitate to use African soldiers in large numbers in Europe, needing their service to bolster their ranks in defense of France. In the French pseudoscientific theory of race, West African soldiers (Figure 1.3) belonged to a so-called "martial race" that considered them to be natural born warriors who made for excellent shock troops. They thus joined other soldiers from French overseas colonies on the frontline in Europe and beyond.[107]

Britain, on the other hand, refused to deploy African soldiers against white men in Europe. Besides the question of upholding the status quo, there was also a belief in the inherent inferiority of black soldiers who were considered neither intellectually or emotionally capable of being good soldiers. Although ready to take the fight to the Germans, the black volunteers of the British West Indies Regiment were excluded from fighting in the trenches and were instead used as laborers. However, in a display of the contradictions in play, the British West Indies Regiment saw action in the Middle East against enemies that were considered "less white" than Europeans. Furthermore, there were black British soldiers scattered in many, if not all, regular British regiments on the Western Front since there was no military law against their admission into the ranks except for officers. Yet by the end of the war, there was at least a handful of black British officers commanding white men.[108] Simultaneously, Britain made the pragmatic

106 Christian Koller, "The Recruitment of Colonial Troops in Africa and Asia and their Deployment in Europe during the First World War," *Immigrants & Minorities* 26, no. 1/2 (2008): 122.
107 Koller, "The Recruitment of Colonial Troops," 119–121; Joe Lunn, "'Les Races Guerrieres': Racial Preconceptions in the French Military about West African Soldiers during the First World War," *Journal of Contemporary History* 34, no. 4 (1999): 517–536. See also Richard S. Fogerty, *Race and War in France: Colonial Subjects in the French Army, 1914–1918* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2008).
108 David Killingray, "The Idea of a British Imperial African Army," *The Journal of African History* 20, no. 3 (1979): 421–436; Richard Smith, *Jamaican Volunteers in the First World War: Race, Masculinity and the Development of National Consciousness* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 100–125; Ray Costello, *Black Tommies: British Soldiers of African Descent in the*

choice to deploy soldiers from British India in Europe within months of the outbreak of the war, a force that was drawn amongst the peoples the British considered to belong to a "martial race" (see Figure 1.2).[109] Canada and Newfoundland accepted the indigenous population into the ranks of the Canadian expeditionary force, as well as Japanese Canadians and other Asian immigrants, but actively sought to segregate black Canadians into labor units where they would not see combat, such as the No. 2 Construction Battalion. However, there were black volunteers who managed to elude official racial segregationist policies and join regular regiments. This is similar to Aboriginal and Torres Island Strait Islander peoples in Australia who, despite being officially excluded from enlisting, still managed to enlist. New Zealand, on the other hand, did not refuse Māori and Pacific Islanders the chance to fight for the British Empire. Black South Africans, however, saw themselves relegated to an early form of apartheid on the Western Front, forced upon them by South African authorities who only accepted them as laborers as part of the South African Labour Corps.[110]

The United States already had a system of segregation in place within its armed forces when it joined the war which was aimed exclusively at African Americans. African Americans were segregated into "colored" units where they would be led by a mixture of white and black officers, although black officers were never allowed to outrank any white officer. The majority of African Americans did not serve as combat soldiers but rather as laborers because of racism.

The training they received reflected the roles they were expected to play. Racism was the reason for why a large part of African American soldiers who actually saw combat did so alongside French soldiers, not American. The segregated 93rd Infantry Division were assigned to the French army by General John J. Pershing who were glad to get rid of them. The other segregated division, the 92nd, came to serve under American command only after British commanders had turned down the offer of having the division be trained by the British army.[111] Simultaneously, men of color who were not of African ancestry were al-

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First World War (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), 17–43. See also Glenford Howe, *Race, War and Nationalism: A Social History of West Indians in the First World War* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2002).

109 George Morton-Jack, *The Indian Army on the Western Front: India's Expeditionary Force to France and Belgium in the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 1–42. For a non-specialist book, see Shrabani Basu, *For King and Another Country: Indian Soldiers on the Western Front 1914–18* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

110 Timothy C. Winegard, *Indigenous Peoples of the British Dominions and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 256–270.

111 Arthur E. Barbeau and Florette Henri, *The Unknown Soldiers: African-American troops in World War I* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), 3–88. See also Chad Williams, *Torchbearers of*

Figure 1.2: Garwhali soldiers from British India on the Western front. August 4, 1915.

lowed into regular regiments. In contrast to African Americans, the indigenous peoples of the United States were considered particularly suitable as soldiers. This view closely resembled Britain and France's understanding of "martial races" and was based entirely on the racist white idea of indigenous peoples as exceptionally warlike.[112] Racism, both institutional and personal, had a fundamental impact on the individual experience of a soldier of color during the First World War. It would decide whether or not you were allowed to enlist, if you would be allowed to bear arms or be relegated to bearing a shovel, and how you would be perceived by the white soldiers and officers you encountered. It would also fundamentally effect whether or not you were remembered for your participation in the conflict.

Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

112 Susan Applegate Krouse, *North American Indians in the Great War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 1–16; Michael L. Tate, "From Scout to Doughboy: The National Debate over Integrating American Indians into the Military, 1891–1918," *Western Historical Quarterly* 17, no. 4 (1986): 417–437.

Figure 1.3: A group of *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* in their camp on the Somme on the Western front.

The marginalization of soldiers of color from the memory of the conflict began within a year of the guns falling silent on the Western Front. Although the sacrifices and victories were remembered amongst the veterans, their families, and in the places they called home, commemoration and remembrance was either non-existent or marginalized in the imperial metropoles. Black British soldiers, such as the British West Indies Regiment, were excluded from participating in the 1919 Victory Parade in London while Indian soldiers were given a separate victory march in London. John Siblon argues that, "officials deliberately constructed a memory of the war as a 'white man's war', fought with the assistance of loyal Asians, with the service of Africans and Caribbeans expressly excluded."[113] French colonial soldiers were hailed as heroes alongside white soldiers who defended France in post-war French memory, a memory that stands in stark contrast to the British historical memory as described at the end of the first section of this chapter. Yet despite their inclusion, Fell and Wardleworth argue, "the construction of war memorials and inclusion of *tirailleurs* in annual Victory

113 John Siblon, "Negotiating Hierarchy and Memory: African and Caribbean Troops from Former British Colonies in London's Imperial Spaces," *The London Journal* 41 (2016): 299 – 312.

celebrations was always double-edged, as at the same time as such activities were commemorating the sacrifices of black Africans on European soil, they were simultaneously – and perhaps predominantly – celebrating Empire." The *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* were represented as heroic and loyal soldiers of the French empire but were not given a voice of their own.[114] In Germany, a similar representation occurred in which the Askari, the East African soldiers who fought for the German Empire in Africa, were romanticized as loyal, trustworthy soldiers against the backdrop of an exciting and honorable colonial adventure. Their agency, in similarity with the French West African soldiers, was rejected in favor of glorifying colonialism.[115] While the African American soldiers of the 370th Regiment were welcomed home to Chicago with a victory parade, black soldiers became the target of racial violence in the south. Although the memory of the black participation in the war would be remembered within the African American community, in similarity to other soldiers of color, their participation was marginalized from the wider American historical memory of the war. While audiences all around the world were gripped by the film adaptation of *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930), African American participation in the war was ridiculed in the blackface comedy *Anybody's War* (1930).[116]

114 Fogerty, *Race and War in France*, 292; Fell and Wardleworth, "The Colour of War Memory," 321–331.

115 Michelle R. Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries: African Soldiers, Conquest, and Everyday Colonialism in German East Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2014), 8–10, 209–212.

116 Jennifer D. Keene, "The Memory of the Great War in the African American Community," in *Unknown Soldiers: The American Expeditionary Forces in Memory and Remembrance,* ed. Mark Snell (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2008), 60–76.

Table 1: Estimates on select groups of soldiers of color that served on the Western front, 1914–1918.

	Total recruited[117]
French West Africa	166,000
Madagascar	46,000
Indochina	50,000
Algeria	140,000
Morocco	24,300
Tunisia	47,000
Kanak soldiers (New Caledonia, France)	1,105
African American soldiers (United States)	370,000
Native American soldiers (United States)	12,000
Congolese soldiers (Belgium)	~32
South African Native Labour Corps	25,048
British West Indies Regiment	15,204
British India	1,400,000
Aboriginal soldiers (Australia)	~946
Māori soldiers (New Zealand)	2,668
Pacific Islanders soldiers (New Zealand)	631
Black Canadian soldiers	~1,200
First Nations soldiers (Canada)	4,000
Japanese Canadian soldiers	222
Chinese Labour Corps	140,000

117 Exact numbers are notoriously difficult to determine. The numbers should be considered estimates and do not take into consideration whether or not soldiers were sent overseas or remained at home attending to garrison or other duties. There will be different estimations as to how many soldiers were recruited from a specific colony. British India, for example, ranges from over a million to 1.7 million in some estimates, out of which approximately 900,000 served overseas. The list should not be considered a complete list of all categories of soldiers of color that served during the war but is instead only a selection of those who served on the Western front. In many cases, many of these soldiers, in particularly soldiers from British India and the British West Indies, served in other theaters of war such as Africa and the Middle East. The difficulty of estimating the number of black British and Afro-German soldiers is covered

Representations of soldiers of color in First World War films, television, and other forms of visual media continued to be rare well into the early twenty-first century. The majority of films set during the First World War were centered around white protagonists, even those set in Africa.[118] Films such as *The African Queen* (1951), *The Royal African Rifles* (1953), and *Shout at the Devil* (1976) fall into the category of First World War films that follow the trajectory of historical memory that portray colonial soldiers as a quiet, loyal, and obedient mass to their white leaders. The winner of the 1976 Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film, *La Victoire en chantant* (*Black and White in Color*, 1976), is the first major exception to this formula. Although centered around white protagonists, this anti-colonial satire gives Africans lines that ridicule French colonialists and vividly shows the terrible conditions that colonial soldiers had to face, from forced conscription to the hardships of war. White men are not shown as suffering but black men are. When a British force arrives at the end of the film to accept the surrender of the German fort that has been the main antagonist of the film, the force is to the surprise of the French colonialists not led by a white British officer, but rather by Captain Kapoor, a soldier from British India. Despite being a parody of both the war and French colonialism, *La Victoire en chantant* manages the feat of providing more visual representation for colonial soldiers than most movies have before or since. It would take until the fifth episode of the first season of the television show *The Young Indiana*

in-depth in the next chapter, but I have chosen to include numbers of soldiers of Congolese ancestry that served in the Belgium army on the Western front as well as an overall estimation of black Canadians that served overseas (and not only the No. 10 Construction Battalion). Alongside domiciled black British soldiers, individual soldiers from British colonies in Africa, the British West Indies, as well as British India also served in regular British regiments, as did domiciled British soldiers of Asian ancestry. The numbers for the Chinese Labour Corps include those who served for France as well as Britain, only in the latter in which the Chinese laborers were organized into a formation known as the Chinese Labour Corps. Chinese laborers were also employed by the Russian Empire on the Eastern front. Fogarty, *Race and War in France*, 27; Muckle, "Kanak Experiences of WWI," 1329; Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy*, 6; Applegate Krouse, *North American Indians in the Great War*, 80; Griet Brosens, "Congo aan den Yser: De 32 Congolese soldaten van het Belgisch leger in de Eerste Wereldoorlog," *Cahiers Bruxellois – Brusselse Cahiers* 1N (2014): 254; Winegard, *Indigenous Peoples of the British Dominions*, 229 – 235; Smith, *Jamaican Volunteers in the First World War*, 80 – 81; Garton, "The Dominions, Ireland, and India," 155; Philippa Scarlett, "Aboriginal service in the First World War: Identity, recognition and the problem of mateship," *Aboriginal History* 39 (2015): 165; Shaw, "Black Canadians' Fight to Enlist in WWI," 565 – 566; Dick, "Sergeant Masumi Mitsui," 445 – 446; Guoqi, "China and Empire," 214.

118 For an in-depth investigation into the multitude of fictional accounts of the East Africa campaign in both film and literature, see Samson, "Fictional Accounts of the East Africa Campaign," 379 – 410.

Jones Chronicles (1992–1993) until a similar depth of representation could be seen again. The episode, titled *German East Africa, December 1916* (later released as half of the television film *Oganga, The Giver and Taker of Life*, 1999), follows the titular character during his time as an officer in the Belgian Army fighting against German forces in East Africa. Although ostensibly centered on a white protagonist, the 47-minute episode humanizes the African soldiers that Jones fights alongside through the character of Sergeant Barthélèmy, a Congolese soldier whom he befriends. Alongside depictions of Belgian mistreatment of colonial soldiers and the effects of the war in Africa on the civilian population, Barthélèmy is shown having his own political opinions about Belgian colonialism and the future of his people, in addition to his own anger of having been forcibly conscripted. The central act of agency in the episode belongs to Barthélèmy as he rescues an orphaned infant from a war-ravaged village where the infant had been left to die by his Belgian commander, expressively going against his orders. While Jones follows orders of the Belgian commander, Barthélèmy exposes the hypocrisy of the white soldiers. This sympathetic portrayal of an African soldier and the civilian population in Africa during the war has not yet been matched.

If portrayals of the First World War in Africa can be considered scarce then depictions of the multiracial Western Front were even more rare. The documentary series *The Great War* (1964) that had such an impact on the historical memory of the war in Britain only briefly mentions or shows colonial soldiers, often within the larger context of the British Empire which was typical of the historical memory of colonial soldiers. In fact, it was not until the documentary *Untold: Mutiny* (1999) that the British West Indies Regiment were introduced to a British television audience.[119] The 1990s marked the beginnings of a gradual acknowledgement of the multiracial Western Front in films and television. In *Young Indiana Jones and the Treasure of the Peacock's Eye* (1995), Indian soldiers are depicted fighting on the Western Front in 1918 at the beginning of the television film and it is an Indian soldier who propels the adventure that the titular character goes on. As the centenary of the First World War steadily approached, there was an increase in references and representations of soldiers of color in popular culture. In the animated film *Princess and the Frog* (2009), Tiana, the first Disney princess of African ancestry, has a photograph of her father in a First World War army uniform, alongside a Distinguished Service Cross (the second highest military decoration after the Medal of Honor and the highest decoration an African American soldier could be given during the war). It is implied that he not only

119 See Tinsley, "Muslims in the Great War Semi-Centenary," 407–412; Smith, "The multicultural First World War," 357.

fought but died in the war. This inclusion is reflective of how the memory of the black participation in the war was kept alive in the African American community during the 1920s and beyond.[120] In *War Horse* (2011), Indian officers are shown on the Western Front together with British officers as they plan the ill-fated cavalry charge that introduces the viewer to First World War warfare in the film.

The First World War centenary in 2014 led to many efforts by organizations, museums, and governments in Europe, North America, and Australasia to highlight the multiracial participation in the war, often in an attempt to reframe dominant narratives surrounding the First World War.[121] This was reflective in several productions that sought to achieve the same goal. Television documentaries, such as the two-part BBC2 documentary *The World's War: Forgotten Soldiers of Empire* (2014) and its accompanying book, sought to reveal the omission of soldiers of color in historical memory and the racism that they endured. The BBC war dramas *The Crimson Field* (2014) and *The Passing Bells* (2014) gave viewers the first ever depictions of black soldiers from the British West Indies. Plays like *Black Diggers* (2014), *The Hallowed Turf* (2014), and *Wipers* (2016), centered on Aboriginal soldiers in the Australian expeditionary force, on the black British officer Walter Tull, and on Indian soldiers respectively, brought the multiracial First World War to the theater stage. Even narratives of children of color were explored, as in the animated film *Adama* (2015) that follows the titular character, a young boy from French West Africa who sets out to find his older brother who is serving in the French army on the Western Front. Furthermore, the first ever inclusion of a playable soldier of color in a First World War video game could be seen in *Valiant Hearts: The Great War* (2014) in the shape of Freddie, an African American man who volunteered to serve in French army. It is within this wider context of increased commemoration and representation for soldiers of color brought forth by the centenary that *Battlefield 1* was developed and finally released in 2016.

120 See Keene, "The Memory of the Great War in the African American Community," 60–76.
121 Andrew Mycock, "The First World War Centenary in the UK: 'A Truly National Commemoration'?," *The Round Table* 103, no. 2 (2014): 153–163; Smith, "The multicultural First World War," 358–359; Fell and Wardleworth, "The Colour of War Memory," 329–331. See also Ben Wellings and Shanti Sumartojo, eds., *Commemorating Race and Empire in the First World War Centenary* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018).

Defending the White Mythic Space

It was a bold choice of art for a cover (Figure 2.1). For a historical first-person shooter video game that was distributed by one of the largest gaming companies in the world, it looked nothing like that one would have come to expect from the genre. Instead of a heroic white soldier charging into battle, the cover of *Battlefield 1* displays a heroic black soldier. Wearing an American uniform, the soldier stares intensively into the distance as he takes aim with a Mauser C96 pistol, his cape flowing in the wind behind him. In his other hand he's holding trench mace, a type of improvised weapon used by soldiers in the First World War during trench raids. From his cartridge belt hangs a gasmask, a canteen, a trench knife, and a German MP 18 submachine gun. To complete the image, a zeppelin is going down in flames in the background. The cover art encapsulates the intentions of the makers of the game who wanted to portray a different depiction of the First World War than what the traditional representations had previously offered viewers through film and television. Not only was it a video game with a First World War setting, something that was rare in itself, but it was a video game that wanted to differentiate itself from what had come before and from what might come in the future. The choice of a unique historical setting paid off amongst potential players and the game became a critical and commercial success.

There were some who did not respond well to the representation that *Battlefield 1* offered to its players. To them, the inclusion of soldiers of color, specifically soldiers of African ancestry, in a video game set during the First World War was a terrible mistake. There were no black soldiers fighting the First World War. If there were black soldiers present, the argument continued, they hardly saw combat. Black people therefore did not belong in a game that was supposedly historically accurate. The traditional representations that the makers of the game wanted to move beyond were now being evoked by players of the game in an effort to defend the white mythic space of the First World War. This chapter is divided into two parts that will analyze this phenomena. The first part will discuss the intentions and aims behind the inclusion of soldiers of color in the game and will analyze the representation of African American soldiers and racism in the game's single player mode. The second part will focus on the forms that the backlash and subsequent rejection of soldiers of color in *Battlefield 1* took in online communities from the reveal of the cover art in May 2016 through to the release of the game in October 2016 and beyond. I will analyze the racist discourse surrounding the presence of black bodies in the historical video game and the frequently used exclusionary arguments in order to provide an understanding of how it was shaped by the white mythic space.

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Figure 2.1: *Battlefield 1* cover art.

"You Are Not Expected to Survive"

Battlefield 1 was developed by the Swedish video game developer DICE and distributed by Electronic Arts. Previous installments in the *Battlefield* series (the first game, *Battlefield 1942*, was released in 2002) had taken place in various historical time periods, such as the Second World War and the Vietnam War, in addition to contemporary and fictitious future wars. A *Battlefield* game set during the First World War had been pitched numerous time in the past but had been met with skepticism from those who did not believe that the war suited the sort of fast-paced, action-packed gameplay that the series was known for. The executive vice president of Electronic Arts Worldwide Studios, Patrick Söderlund, confessed that when the development team at DICE "presented the idea to me of World War 1, I absolutely rejected it [...] I said World War 1, it's trench warfare; it can't be fun to play."[122] Kempshall points out that the release of a similar game, *Verdun 1914 – 1918* (2013), showed that there was a mainstream market for the game that DICE was pitching. The pitch that ultimately bore fruition, spearheaded by Creative Director Stefan Strandberg and Era Designer Martin Kopparhed at DICE, focused specifically on going beyond traditional narratives of the First World War and the Western Front.[123] In an interview, the Lead Designer of the game Daniel Berlin stated that

> When we set out on this game, we wanted to depict not just the common view of what the war was like. We wanted to challenge some preconceptions. We want to delve into some of the unknowns of World War One. Maybe people don't know that this person fought or that person fought, that this army was involved. We're stretching out and bringing all those stories into the game.[124]

In the interview, the interviewer Dean Takashi brings up the fact that people had made a note of the black soldier on the cover. Asked whether or not this was a conscious decision with the intention of showing the unknown aspects of the war, Berlin answered in the affirmative: "That's the thing. People don't know

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122 Eddie Makuch, "EA Boss Originally Rejected Battlefield WW1 Pitch," *GameSpot*, May 17, 2016, https://www.gamespot.com/articles/ea-boss-originally-rejected-battlefield-ww1-pitch/1100-6439891/.

123 For an in-depth discussion about the research carried out by the team at DICE and how it relates to First World War historiography, in addition to DICE's aims and intentions, see Kempshall, "War collaborators," 3 – 10.

124 Dean Takashi, "EA DICE's lead designer answers our questions about Battlefield 1," *GamesBeat*, May 6, 2016, https://venturebeat.com/2016/05/06/ea-dices-lead-designer-answers-our-questions-about-battlefield-1/.

that this was the case. We want to show diversity in the game. That's been a key goal."[125] There was also an educational element in play. Senior Producer Aleksander Grøndal stated that what he hoped the game would achieve "by raising awareness of this era, [is] that it's so much more than just the Western Front, and maybe get people excited to read up on it," adding specifically about the cover art that DICE "wanted to make sure when you see it that it felt like something different, I haven't seen this before, what is this?"[126]

Challenging preconceptions about the First World War was therefore a central aim that *Battlefield 1* was meant to achieve and it began with the cover art. The image of the African American soldier became an integral part of *Battlefield 1*'s promotional efforts, featuring different images of the soldier on posters and other promotional materials. A 14-inch statue of the soldier was even included in the game's Collector's Edition and a package of downloadable content that was offered to those who pre-ordered the game included "themed items inspired by the heroic Harlem Hellfighter Infantry Regiment."[127]

The downloadable content revealed that the African American soldier in question belonged to the segregated 369th Infantry Regiment, the "Harlem Hellfighters". The 369th, part of the 93rd (Provisional) Division, was formerly the 15th New York National Guard Regiment and during the war the regiment consisted of African American men from across the state of New York. The 369th saw more time fighting on the Western Front than any other American unit during the war, suffering tremendous casualties in the process. It was highly decorated, with the entire regiment receiving the French *Croix de Guerre* and several Distinguished Service Crosses awarded to members of the regiment. One of its members, Private (later Sergeant) Henry Johnson, became one of the most famous American soldiers of the war when he, on May 15, 1918, single-handedly fought back against a German raiding party after his fellow soldier Private Needham Roberts had been badly wounded and prevented Roberts' capture in the process. Johnson inflicted four dead and many more wounded on the enemy, some of it in

125 Takashi, "EA DICE's lead designer answers our questions about Battlefield 1".

126 Wesley Yin-Poole, "DICE's Great War: classes, horses and more in Battlefield 1," *EuroGamer*, May 10, 2016, https://www.eurogamer.net/articles/2016-05-10-battlefield-1-interview-dice; "'Battlefield 1' Sacrificed Historical Accuracy to Make The Great War Fun," *Motherboard*, September 26, 2016, http://motherboard.vice.com/read/battlefield-1-historical-accuracy.

127 Mat Paget, "Check Out Battlefield 1's $220 Collector's Edition," *GameSpot*, May 6, 2016, https://www.gamespot.com/articles/check-out-battlefield-1s-220-collectors-edition/1100-6439589/; Chris Pereira, "The New Battlefield Is Actually Called Battlefield 1, Leaked Images Show," *GameSpot*, May 6, 2016, https://www.gamespot.com/articles/the-new-battlefield-is-actually-called-battlefield/1100-6439566/.

hand-to-hand combat.[128] The approaching American centennial of the First World War in 2017 brought increased public attention to the role that African American soldiers had played during the war, and how they were remembered in the aftermath of the war, but no unit received as much attention as the Harlem Hellfighters whose story was fictionalized in the graphic novel *The Harlem Hellfighters* (2014). Exhibitions and projects, such as the digitizing of personnel cards by the New York State Military Museum, joined efforts to memorialize the 369th.[129] One of the regiment's famous members also returned to the national spotlight. After decades of efforts by different groups for proper recognition of his bravery, Sergeant Henry Johnson was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor by President Barack Obama in 2015.[130] Set within this context, the 369th as a focal point in the promotional materials of *Battlefield 1* appears as a continuation of the ongoing efforts to memorialize the regiment and African American participation in the war.

The game's cinematic single player campaign consists of several self-contained episodic stories titled "War Stories". Six stories are available in total and include *Through Mud and Blood* (a British tank crew fights for survival on the Western Front in 1918), *Friends in High Places* (an American pilot joins the Royal Air Corps on the Western Front under false pretenses in 1917), *Avanti Savoia!* (an Italian infantryman searches for his twin brother on the Italian front in 1918), *The Runner* (an Australian message runner sees action in the Gallipoli campaign, 1915), and *Nothing Is Written* (a Bedouin woman fights in the closing stages of the Arab Revolt together with T.E. Lawrence, "Lawrence of Arabia", in 1918). Our focus will be on the prologue of the game, the first war story to be played, titled *Storm of Steel*.

The story begins with a cinematic sequence. Birds are heard chirping alongside the song "Dream a Little Dream of Me" as the camera pans down from an open window, the iron frame of a bed within view, to the sleeping form of an African American man. Seemingly dreaming, the man moves anxiously in his sleep as a white hand comes out of the frame and places itself on his shoulder. Startled, the man awakens and the scene transitions into a flashback to the war. The same man, revealed as a Harlem Hellfighter, is helped to his feet by a French sol-

128 For a summary of the participation of the 369th, see Barbeau and Henri, *The Unknown Soldiers*, 111–122.

129 Chris Carola, "NY museum digitizing Harlem Hellfighters records," *Associated Press*, November 28, 2014, https://apnews.com/article/c9de3005b7f94bdfbd472771eb747a9e.

130 Michael D. Shear, "Two World War I Soldiers Posthumously Receive Medal of Honor," *The New York Times*, June 2, 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/03/us/two-world-war-i-soldiers-to-posthumously-receive-medal-of-honor.html.

dier in a chaotic battlefield. The man stumbles back and forth, seemingly in shock, as he watches the hand-to-hand combat occurring all around him: French, American, and German soldiers all locked in a fight to the death on a muddy, dark battlefield. The man is charged by a German soldier who is promptly beaten down. The fight continues all around him. The camera focuses on the man, now seen holding a rifle, unable or unwilling to act until the screen suddenly turns to black (Figure 2.2). Short introductory texts follow that introduce the player to the historical setting of *Battlefield 1*. It ends with the player being informed that "what follows is frontline combat. You are not expected to survive." The player is then thrust into actual gameplay as they now find themselves assuming the role of a different African American soldier. From our point of view, we are told by a fellow soldier that "we are surrounded, we need to hold this line." Death is inevitable. We play as the soldier until his demise, as a randomized name (such as Harvey Nottoway) and a date of birth and death (1889 – 1918) appear on the screen. As the player gets a bird's-eye view of the battlefield, an American narrator tells us that, "We came from all over the world, so many of us thinking that this war would be our rite of passage, our great adventure. Let me tell you, it was no adventure." As the voice-over comes to an end, the player assumes a new soldier, a machine gunner, as the fight against the approaching German soldiers continues. Death is inevitable once again. A new voice-over appears as the player swaps bodies once again: "New killing machines, like the tank, changed the shape of the world overnight. Luckily, they were mostly on our side, mostly." The player now takes control of a British tank on the offensive until it, too, faces its demise. The narrator: "Instead of adventure, we found fear, and in war the only true equalizer is death." The player returns to the battlefield, and to the Harlem Hellfighters, as they continue their desperate battle. Death continues to be inevitable. Every soldier that the player takes control of will die. After an artillery bombardment towards the end of this desperate onslaught, the scene again cuts to black and transitions into a cinematic sequence. Out of the point of view of a soldier, the camera scans the muddy, rainy, and scorched battlefield with scattered corpses all around. The only survivors appear to be the player and a German soldier. The scene moves out of the point of view to reveal that it is the African American soldier from the beginning of the prologue whose eyes we've been seeing out of. He aims his rifle against the German soldier who responds by doing the same. A standoff ensues, yet none of the soldiers fire. As light breaks through the clouds and spills light upon the battlefield, both soldiers lower their rifles. Narrator: "They push–we push. Every once in a while, we push hard enough that the light breaks through the clouds so the world beyond the war glimmers just out of reach." The screen fades to black and the player is given a montage of

scenes from the other stories. Narrator: "The war is the world and the world is the war. But behind every gunsight is a human being. We are those people. We are the jaded and we are the naïve. We are the honorable and the criminal. We are the bound-for-legend and the lost-to-history. We are the knights of the sky, the ghosts in the desert, and the rats in the mud. These are our stories."

Figure 2.2: The principle Harlem Hellfighter in *Storm of Steel*.

The entire story lasts approximately 12 minutes. It is the shortest story in the single player mode and is meant to function as a tutorial to introduce new players to the mechanics of the game. Yet *Storm of Steel* is the full extent of African American representation in the single player mode. Despite the heavy promotional focus on the Harlem Hellfighters, they play a very limited role in the game. Seen within the wider context of the war stories, the inclusion of African Americans appears as an afterthought in the single player mode. They appear in passing rather than having a central role or a real narrative of their own. While the other stories, all except one centered on a white male combatant, allow room for exposition through dialogue or narration, the player is never given an explanation of who the black soldiers are or where they are from. Only in the description of the story are we informed that the soldiers are part of the 369th regiment.[131] Even more critical is the absence of individuality. While an argument

131 The description is as follows: "A desperate German breakthrough threatens the position held by the US 369th Infantry, the 'Harlem Hellfighters'."

could be made that this is meant to reflect the industrialized warfare of the First World War that killed millions of soldiers and tore their individuality away, pushing them into a mass of anonymity, every single main character of the other five stories have their own backstory, motivations, and, most importantly, a name. We are never given the name of the Harlem Hellfighter from whose perspective the story is told from. The Harlem Hellfighters that the player controls are given names only after they die, names that are all randomized and without meaning as the player has no emotional connection to the soldiers whose faces they never get to see. What are they fighting for? Their agency, fictional and historical, is completely erased and replaced by nothing but inevitable death. African American agency dies with their bodies. In a game where the choices players were offered to complete the stories in the single player mode were emphasized, the denial of choice and inevitability of death as it relates to black bodies become very visible. Even the title of the story, *Storm of Steel*, is deprived of an African American reference. For example, instead of the story being titled *Men of Bronze*, which was a wartime nickname given to the 369th by the French in admiration of the regiment, the actual title of the story is a reference to a white soldier's famous post-war autobiography: German officer Ernst Jünger's memoirs *In Stahlgewittern* (1920, *Storm of Steel*). Consequently, the brief story reduces the Harlem Hellfighters to being an anonymous mass of dead, black soldiers without agency.

This has disturbing implications and continuations. Kishonna L. Gray and David J. Leonard have remarked on this imagery specifically in the context of *Battlefield 1*, writing that the prologue of the game is reflective of how video games "mirror and embody the injustices we see throughout popular culture and in society at large," further pointing out that the inevitability of Black Death in the game caused

> many Black gamers on social media to reflect on their uncomfortableness witnessing and experiencing hypervisible Black Death. We liken this pattern within *Battlefield 1* to the present era of consuming and sharing Black Death via associated hashtags, where we witness the final moments of Black and Brown life without context or a historic backdrop (e. g., #PhilandoCastile, #EricGarner, #TamirRice). The humanity of Black lives is lost, reducing life to the spectacle of Black Death.[132]

While Gray and Leonard draw connections between *Storm of Steel* and the consumption of contemporary injustices, TreaAndrea M. Russworm considers this

132 Kishonna L. Gray and David J. Leonard, "Not a Post-Racism and Post-Misogyny Promised Land: Video Games as Instruments of (In)justice," in *Woke Gaming: Digital Challenges to Oppression and Social Injustice*, ed. Kishonna L. Gray and David J. Leonard (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018), 5 – 6.

phenomena within the larger context of black representation in dystopian speculative fiction with an emphasis on video games. A critical problem, Russworm argues, is that instead of representing black characters in a manner which moves beyond historical tropes of blackness, "the historical significance of blackness as an overdetermined signifier for abject suffering and dogged survival during bleak social and political times", the makers of dystopian video games instead resort to reusing those very same tropes. In the dystopian video games that Russworm has studied and in *Battlefield 1*, sacrificial blackness is inevitable. Black suffering is employed in order to "shore up white characters agency", something that is particularly evident in *Battlefield 1* as the player has no choice but to play the prologue in order to access the other predominantly white and male war stories. The flawed tradition of "conflating black identity with the pathos of sacrifice and suffering" is central to *Storm of Steel*.[133] The player's empathy in *Storm of Steel* is derived from the destruction and death of black soldiers. Denied a motivation, a personality, and even a name, it is the only way that black soldiers are able to evoke empathy in the player.

The imagery of destroyed and mutilated bodies of black men has a long history in white representation of African American soldiers. The white belief in the racial inferiority of African American men has meant that black male bodies have been projected with both physical and intellectual defects that made them unfit for citizenship or being soldiers. The bodies of African American men were considered grotesque and inhuman, and seen as "a site of degeneration, death, and disease". The end result was a black body that was considered congenitally disabled for which exclusion was fully justified. African American authors of war literature specifically refrained from graphic descriptions of the injured black body after the release of William Wells Brown's novel *Clotel* (1867). It would not appear again until the Second World War. In similarity to Gray and Leonard's uncomfortable black *Battlefield 1* players, Jennifer C. James argues that part of the reason for this reluctance on the part of African American writers "can be explained as a response to a historical legacy in which the routinized torture and mutilation of the black body was made public in events that allowed whites the opportunity to witness the transformational power of violence, the black body diminishing before their very eyes, forced into object status." James further argues that African American writers wanted black soldiers to be considered identical to white soldiers without the traditional conflation of the black body as disabled and damaged. Through war literature,

133 Russworm, "Dystopian Blackness," 109 – 126.

black bodies could be "rehabilitated" into becoming "normal" bodies fit for "normal" soldiers.[134]

Storm of Steel therefore follows a tradition of public representation of disabled and suffering black bodies, imbued with the notion of death, that goes back centuries in the United States. There is nothing in the story that speaks of the specific African American experience of the First World War. Racism was an important element of the African American experience, from the moment they were enlisted to their post-war life, yet it is completely absent in the story as are other important elements, such as the camaraderie felt between the black soldiers or their encounters with French soldiers and civilians. The choice made to include an unidentifiable and anonymous narrator reinforces the representation of African American soldiers as an undifferentiated and anonymous mass of men in the game even as it focuses on one particular regiment. The history of the diverse African American participation in the war subsequently becomes reductive. Historical inaccuracies aside, the narration provided for the story is filled with First World War clichés of loss of innocence, horror, and futility – set against the visual backdrop of mud and rain. The implied homogeneity of the experiences of combatants across nationalities, cultures, race, and fronts that is present in the narration obscures the complicated and diverse reality of the conflict for soldiers of color.

Storm of Steel follows a pattern that Richard Smith has pointed out as being characteristic of efforts for inclusion that refrains from addressing difficult histories during the First World War centenary.[135] The efforts of centering African American soldiers in the game's visuals become mute in the single player story as the narrative resorts to antiracialism and universality in its representation of African American soldiers. What could have been an opportunity to educate about historical racism and soldiers of color within an exciting narrative, in accordance with the expressed pre-launch desire to create interest in the historical war by the makers of the game, is wasted on a tutorial.

The only mention of racism and the historical context of soldiers of color occurs in *Battlefield 1*'s codex, a series of encyclopedic entries about the history of the war. Three entries in particular, "African American Troops", "Colonial Troops", and "In War We Are Equal" (Figure 2.3), are worth briefly investigating in order to understand the full representation of diversity in the game. Researched and written by Indy Neidell, writer and host of the popular YouTube

134 Jennifer J. James, *Freedom Bought With Blood: African American War Literature from the Civil War to World War II* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 10 – 74.
135 Smith, "The multicultural First World War," 359.

channel *The Great War*, and his research assistant Markus Linke,[136] the codex entries consist of a short text that is sometimes read out loud by a narrator, accompanied by imagery taken from the game. As the titles make clear, the codex entries "African American Troops" and "Colonial Troops" are brief overviews of the involvement of soldiers of color in the conflict. The codex entry on African American soldiers begins with the following paragraph:

> The United States Congress passed the Selective Service Act in 1917 for all males aged 21–31, allowing African American men to serve in the U.S. Army. Many were eager to join the war effort, and only weeks after the USA declared war on Germany the quota of soldiers was already filled. However, this did not mean that there was no discrimination or segregation within the army. African Americans were not allowed to serve in the Marines or in high positions in the Navy, though every other branch was theoretically open to them.

The remaining two paragraphs heavily skew towards the 369th, but the above paragraph is the only information that we receive about the racism experienced by African Americans, provided without details. The entry on colonial troops mentions no racism whatsoever, but the opening paragraph puts the mobilization of colonial troops within the framework of colonialism: "As the great empires of Europe went to war, so did their colonies throughout the globe. France brought Zouaves from Africa to Flanders; Britain brought in Gurkhas from India, Canadians, South Africa, and ANZAC – the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps."

The absence of further discussions of racism can perhaps be explained by the presence of the third entry, "In War We Are Equal". With the subtitle "Racism during World War 1", it is worth quoting in full in order to see how historical racism in the First World War is described:

> The Great War took place in a time when European nations still held firm control over colonial possessions in Africa and Asia. When the war broke out, the European nations mobilized colonial troops to join the fight on the continent – despite the ignorance of many European officers, who initially had little respect for colonial soldiers.
>
> But even though segregated in their own battalions, non-white soldiers from Algeria, Morocco, Nepal, Indochina, and many other parts of the world were soon standing in the same filthy trenches and charging over the same battlefields as their European comrades. Soldiers of different backgrounds came to respect one another as they fought side by side against the shared enemies and suffered the same hardships.

136 Kempshall, "War collaborators," 10. See also The Great War, "Our Contribution To Battlefield 1 I THE GREAT WAR," *YouTube*, November 22, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Shmmza-lWY0.

THE WORLD
IN WAR WE ARE EQUAL
THE WORLD
RACISM DURING WORLD WAR 1
Win 1 game of Domination
The Great War took place in a time when European nations still held firm control over colonial possessions in Africa and Asia. When the war broke out, the European nations mobilized colonial troops to join the fight on the continent — despite the ignorance of many European officers, who initially had little respect for colonial soldiers.
But even though segregated in their own battalions, non-white soldiers from Algeria, Morocco, Nepal, Indochina, and many other parts of the world were soon standing in the same filthy trenches and charging over the same battlefields as their European comrades. Soldiers of different backgrounds came to respect one another as they fought side by side against the shared enemies and suffered the same hardships.
When the United States joined the war in 1917, the country was still racially segregated. Even though the U.S. Army allowed African American troops to serve in the regular army, they endured racism and prejudice. Some white soldiers refused to
CLOSE
SCROLL

Figure 2.3: The codex entry for "In War We Are Equal".

> When the United States joined the war in 1917, the country was still racially segregated. Even though the U.S. Army allowed African American troops to serve in the regular army, they endured racism and prejudice. Some white soldiers refused to salute black officers, and officers' clubs and casinos were segregated. The harsh reality of the Western Front, however, gave all the men the same opportunity to prove themselves in combat.

The entry provides the reader with a sanitized and vague understanding of racism in the First World War. Although limited by space, there is no explanation or even a description of the types of racial prejudice that soldiers of color would have faced. Only African American soldiers are granted further details. While segregation is at the center of the entry, it makes no effort to explain the racist thinking behind segregation. The vague statement implying that European officers initially had little respect for colonial soldiers is not applicable to the different colonial armies that were involved in the war and whose soldiers were seen through a diverse array of racial representations in relation to their martial abilities, all of which was situated within a colonial hierarchy of race and power. Moreover, as the title of the codex entry ("In War We Are Equal") reveals, the description disturbingly moves in a ahistorical direction. The final sentence describing that the reality of the Western Front "gave all the men the same opportunity to prove themselves in combat" is a mischaracterization of the experiences of men of color in uniform. Racism and racial theories determined if you were allowed to take arms or if you were relegated to laboring in the rear lines. While soldiers of color undoubtedly suffered the same hardships as their

white comrades in the trenches, the additional racial abuse and discrimination that they encountered was an aspect that was unique to their war. Being at the frontline did not make them equal to white soldiers, not even in death.[137] We do not know how many players of the game actually read the codex entries or if they did, what they took from it. To access them, the player was required to not only have an internet connection but was also required to unlock them through the completion of challenges (such as "perform 3 kill assists" or "win 1 game of Domination") in the single and multiplayer modes. For those players unable to access the multiplayer features, all the context they are given about African Americans in the First World War is in *Storm of Steel* – an empty act of racial inclusion.

White Man's War, White Man's Video Game

On May 6, 2016, the official reveal trailer for *Battlefield 1* was released on YouTube. The trailer officially revealed not only the name of the new game, but also the time period that the game would be set in, the look of the game, and the cover art. By May 10, it had become the most liked trailer on YouTube, garnering almost 1.2 million likes with over 19 million views.[138] While the majority of the responses to the trailer were full of praise and excitement, it took approximately 16 minutes after its release for the video to receive its first comment questioning the presence of a black soldier. A commenter with the username Cheshire was the first commenter who expressed their discontent, writing that they "hope the protagonist isn't black. They weren't in the war at that time." It did not take long before other commenters expressed similar thoughts. Aradim90 wondered "Why is the guy at the end black? In WWI? Wut", while Naz Ra' asked "Why the fuck is there a black dude at the end of the trailer? Should be a Caucasian soldier as it's WW1", and Retro joined in, asking "why is the cover a black soldier?in WW1 history there was hardly any black soldiers who fought in that war.WWw [WW2] yes for sure but not WW1 so why this cover it makes no sense Dice any response to this Inaccurate depiction of WW1?".[139] Comments like these, which

137 See Michèle Barrett, "Death and the afterlife: Britain's colonies and dominions," in Das, *Race, Empire and First World Writing*, 301–317.

138 Jonas Mäki, "The Battlefield 1 trailer is the most liked on Youtube ever," *GameReactor*, May 10, 2016, https://www.gamereactor.eu/the-battlefield-1-trailer-is-the-most-liked-on-youtube-ever/.

139 Cheshire, May 6, 2016, comment on Battlefield, "Battlefield 1 Official Reveal Trailer," *YouTube*, May 6, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c7nRTF2SowQ&lc= UggnQEyjJxH2OXgCoAEC (hereafter only the comment locator, &lc=[comment ID], will be cited when referencing

threw doubt upon the representation of the First World War that DICE was presenting, set the tone for the questioning and subsequent rejection of soldiers of color in the game in defense of the white mythic space. The discourse that YouTube commenter Joey GB initiated by asking "What's with the b[l]ack guy at the end? more blackwashing?" would soon spread to other parts of the internet months before the release of the game.[140]

It would be a discussion thread in the /r/gaming subreddit on Reddit, submitted on the same day the trailer was released, that would function as a microcosm of the entire racist discourse surrounding the inclusion of soldiers of color. While the core discussion in the thread took place in the days following May 6, comments would continue to be submitted as late as November 2 as players, having actually played the game, returned to add to the discussion. Submitted by Reddit user BrinkerBreaker, the discussion thread had the considerably long title of "Battlefield 1 "black washing" the European hero's who died during WW1 by putting an African American on the cover of the game for "diversity" instead of commemorating the Europeans who fought 4 years in WW1". In full, the submission reads:

> This is pretty annoying, as a European it's pretty disheartening to see an African American get the cover of the game when America came into WW1 at the end for only 6 months while Europe fought for 4 years with millions dead as a result of toxins killing them from the inside and blinding them. It might seem like a trivial thing but you have to give credit where credit is due. People fought and died in that war and it was mainly Europeans not Americans. So I see no reason why it should be focused around Americans. You don't see vietnam games protraying british people as the protagonist and cover of those games even if they were involved. It just seems like a case of what's more convenient to draw in the american audience which isn't right at all.[141]

Something that is evident in BrinkerBreaker's comment is that there was a considerable amount of backlash against what was perceived as an exaggerated focus on Americans at this point in time. Fear of the prospect that Americans

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the trailer); Aradim90, May 6, 2016, comment on "Battlefield 1 Official Reveal Trailer," &lc=UgguzsDP5VpzvXgCoAEC; Naz Ra', May 6, 2016, comment on "Battlefield 1 Official Reveal Trailer," &lc=Ughrx5RNx1FRH3gCoAEC; Retro, May 6, 2016, comment on "Battlefield 1 Official Reveal Trailer," &lc=Ugi5LzFDVbL8sngCoAEC.

140 Joey GB, May 6, 2016, comment on "Battlefield 1 Official Reveal Trailer," &lc=UgivchjCTrUc9XgCoAEC.

141 BrinkerBreaker, "Battlefield 1 "black washing" the European hero's who died during WW1 by putting an African American on the cover of the game for "diversity" instead of commemorating the Europeans who fought 4 years in WW1," *Gaming*, May 7, 2016, https://www.reddit.com/r/gaming/comments/4i9ecx/battlefield_1_black_washing_the_european_heros/.

would play a central part in the game was shared by many who believed that EA and DICE were focusing first and foremost on the American market. As succinctly summarized by YouTube commenter Jorgidan 92, "I hope we don't play [as] an american soldier in the campaign, they didn't get involved with the war until close to it's end. I'd rather play as a british soldier."[142]

However, due to the presence of an African American soldier on the cover, Americans were racialized by commenters as outsiders who should not be given priority over white Europeans. When those who objected to this characterization pointed out the existence of the Harlem Hellfighters, a typical response would be to marginalize them further and claim, for example, that going "for diversity while ignoring the millions who died just because a niche group of soldiers fought isn't right".[143] The overt focus on numbers of who was involved and who was supposedly not, and who should therefore be prioritized or ignored altogether, in the comments would become a reoccurring argument that will be analyzed later in this chapter.

Yet as the title of BrinkerBreaker's post makes clear, there is also a focus on the threat of diversity and "blackwashing" history There is no doubt about the fact that DICE consciously set out to produce a diversified representation of the First World War, one that challenged preconceptions and was meant to create awareness and interest in the less known parts of the conflict. The game's diversity, however, was not limited to a multiracial depiction of the men who fought in the war, but also meant a diversity in geographical settings, nationalities of the armies featured, and even the specific war years featured in the game. It was a broader conception of diversity that therefore decided what was to be included in the game and that subsequently resulted in the cover art that some found so controversial.

Commenters like BrinkerBreaker on the other hand had a narrower understanding of diversity that was connected to supposedly nefarious implications. Diversity in their understanding was specifically tied to race, gender, and sexuality. The inclusion of anyone who is not white, male, or heterosexual was supposedly an inclusion that was forced into video games, into a space where they did not fit or belong, for political reasons. YouTube commenter Uproar was one of the early commenters that claimed that the game "Gotta have the racial diversity,

142 Jorgidan 92, May 7, 2016, comment on "Battlefield 1 Official Reveal Trailer," &lc=UgjPWxL-ZuKPeOXgCoAEC.

143 BrinkerBreaker, May 7, 2016, comment on "Battlefield 1 "black washing" the European hero's," https://www.reddit.com/r/gaming/comments/4i9ecx/battlefield_1_black_washing_the_european_heros/d2w7gy4.

where it's not needed."[144] Other representative comments include, "I love the series. but. FUCK THIS DIVERSITY SHIT. STOP BEING SO POLITICALLY CORRECT EA. SHIT!", "The only problem i have with this game is the diversity shit they are doing its disrespectful to the 99% of white people who fought in the war to be overshadowed by a black guy on the cover", and "Looks great but why would you put a black guy on the cover? they werent even in the war, I just hate to see forced diversity ruin history in an attempt to re-write it."[145] Another tactic was to resort to mockery, as Jompo92 chose to do, writing that "Wooow, you guyse arr soo progressive and diverse. Wow such magnificent diversity and tolerance represented in the cover w0ow."[146]

The term "forced diversity" and "Social Justice Warrior" is repeated over and over again in *Battlefield 1* comment sections across social media. It is at this point where the racist discourse of commenters on *Battlefield 1* coincides with and is reinforced by the online #GamerGate movement, the alt-right, and its hateful rhetoric. #GamerGate has its origins on Twitter in the fall of 2014 and began as a violently misogynistic movement that targeted women and feminists in the gaming industry and beyond. The public goal of the movement as expressed by its own followers was that the movement was seeking to restore "ethics in gaming journalism", a euphemism for a conspiracy theory that posits that the gaming industry has a bias against heterosexual white male gamers, the supposed core demographic of video games. Jessica O'Donnell explains that, "Gamergaters argued that attempts by 'feminists and SJWs' to affect change within the contemporary games industry (e.g. by promoting more diverse and positive representations of women and minorities in games) were inherently detrimental, and only served to further their own political agenda."[147] "Social

144 Uproar, May 7, 2016, comment on "Battlefield 1 Official Reveal Trailer," &lc=UggpjW0i2-Z4OuXgCoAEC.

145 Tomthegi, May 7, 2016, comment on "Battlefield 1 Official Reveal Trailer," &lc=UghJdhGj8sXkKXgCoAEC; Curtis, May 7, 2016, comment on "Battlefield 1 Official Reveal Trailer," &lc=Ugho0rG7nxY7P3gCoAEC; SpikyDane, May 12, 2016, comment on "Battlefield 1 Official Reveal Trailer," &lc=UggjcIU2DrCYXHgCoAEC.

146 Jompo92, June 18, 2016, comment on "Battlefield 1 Official Reveal Trailer," &lc=UggfHrWczMMCtHgCoAEC.

147 Jessica O'Donnell, "Militant meninism: the militaristic discourse of Gamergate and Men's Rights Activism," *Media, Culture & Society* 42, no. 5 (2020): 655–656. Bridget M. Blodgett explains it as: "The perceived encroachment of feminists on geek space, represented by Quinn and her successful game, was cast as a conspiracy to fundamentally alter what games were and who they were for, as constructed by decades of marketing." Bridget M. Blodgett, "Media in the Post #GamerGate Era: Coverage of Reactionary Fan Anger and the Terrorism of the Privileged," *Television & New Media* 21, no. 2 (2020): 187.

Justice Warriors" (SJWs) was a particularly prominent derogatory term that referred to those who opposed what #GamerGate stood for and who are actively defending, supporting, or implementing diversity and political correctness. The #GamerGate movement gradually aligned itself with right-wing internet users who had no association with gaming and the movement found support in several extreme right-wing online outlets. Subsequently, many prominent members of the emerging alt-right, a white supremacist movement, found their start in the #GamerGate movement.[148]

"Forced diversity" and "blackwashing" were conceptualized by some *Battlefield 1* commenters as insulting and disrespectful to the memory of the "European heroes" who fought in the war. More serious and nefarious in their minds is the perceived attempt of re-writing the history of the First World War, a history that is perceived as being "99% white" in full accordance with the white mythic space. The strong belief that the diversity in *Battlefield 1* equals a forced inclusion of soldiers of color that erases white European soldiers, effectively "blackwashing" white history, is a theory similar if not identical to the white nationalist "white genocide" or "Great Replacement" conspiracy theory. Described as an "abuse of the idea of genocide by postwar fascists", the "white genocide" theory is an apocalyptic view of the world in which the white European race faces imminent extinction due to a combination of demographic changes (lower birth rates and mass migration) and multiculturalism. White Europe, the theory argues, is being replaced by "alien invaders" (non-white peoples). In the most recent manifesto related to this white nationalist fantasy, the Australian author (who committed the 2019 Christchurch mosque shootings) expressively links part of his racial awakening to visiting a First World War cemetery in France. Eerily echoing the words of *Battlefield 1* commenters from years earlier that argued that diversity disrespected white soldiers, he despaired over how European society was allowing the deaths of white soldiers to be in vain because they were allowing "invaders" to "replace" them.[149]

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148 Blodgett, "Media in the Post #GamerGate Era," 184–196; Aghazadeh et al., "GamerGate: A Case Study," 179–202; O'Donnell, "Militant meninism," 655–671; Kristin MS Bezio, "Ctrl-Alt-Del: GamerGate as a precursor to the rise of the alt-right," *Leadership* 14, no. 5 (2018): 556–566.
149 Paul Jackson, "'White Genocide': Postwar fascism and the ideological value of evoking existential conflicts," in *The Routledge History of Genocide*, ed. Cathie Carmichael and Richard C. Maguire (London: Routledge, 2015), 207–226; A. Dirk Moses, "'White Genocide' and the Ethics of Public Analysis," *Journal of Genocide Research* 21, no. 2 (2019): 201–213. There are two explicit mentions of the "white genocide" conspiracy in the YouTube comments. See Luigi Bianco, May 7, 2016, comment on "Battlefield 1 Official Reveal Trailer," &lc=UgiU2jQiEPTArXgCoAEC and 14jstorm, May 8, 2016, comment on "Battlefield 1 Official Reveal Trailer," &lc= Ugh7-gO7oaiZbHHgCoAEC.

Who or what is to blame for "forced diversity"? In similarity with #GamerGate, commenters turned their anger and disappointment towards Electronic Arts and DICE for supposedly pushing a left-wing political agenda onto its players in addition to pandering to "social justice warriors" and political correctness. These opinions were widely spread in the official Battlefield.com message boards where "SJW" became an insult hurled not only at an imaginary enemy but also at other commenters who disagreed with them. TheCYGamer, for example, called out the game for liberal propaganda, stating that, "This game is trying to shove diversity down our throats [...] This is straight up blackwashing history to please the SJW's." Another commenter expressed their wish for a refund, explaining that "I refuse to be part of this SJW diversity project. Absolutely disrespectful in my opinion, trying to achieve the perfect racial makeup of a video game that has historically portrayed itself as authentic. I was really hoping this leftist cultural rot would have stayed out of this medium of entertainment." Comments like these were not limited to Battlefield.com. A YouTube commenter expressed that the presence of an African American soldier on the cover of the game "just seems kind of disrectful to those who have passed in battle 100 years ago, and it seems the only reason is for "muh diversity" in which case EA can fuck right off (as always)." Resorting to mockery, Battlefield.com user ivanboing went straight to the point when they created a thread titled "DICE hate white men" in order to ridicule the diversity of the game, its developer, and "social justice warriors" : "Lets just drop this WW1 nonsense, that war was so racist and sexist, we should make all soldiers black trans non gender fluid feminists with green hair slaughtering AI unarmed white men, consider it guys. Gotta love Sweden."[150]

It was DICE, located in Sweden, that drew the most ire. The connection between DICE and its geographical location was enough for some to explain the "forced diversity" in the game, as one YouTube commenter was quick to point out after the release of the reveal trailer: "ww1[.] play as black guy[.] lol wut? dice is Swedish[.] Oh that explains it....."[151] In the worldview of these com-

150 TheCYGamer, "Battlefield 1 liberal propaganda," *Battlefield.com*, August 31, 2016, https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/19710/battlefield-1-liberal-propaganda; DingoBingoBoom, October 18, 2016, comment on Lozzen, "Player customization – is it a thing?," *Battlefield.com*, October 16, 2016, https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/comment/262121/#Comment_262121; RaveN, May 7, 2016, comment on "Battlefield 1 Official Reveal Trailer," &lc=UggsyxUqwyBUYHgCoAEC; ivanboing, "Dice hate white men," *Battlefield.com*, May 22, 2017, https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/108172/dice-hate-white-men.

151 Bruce Wayne, May 7, 2016, comment on "Battlefield 1 Official Reveal Trailer," &lc=Ugi1z05lVl3u3XgCoAEC.

menters, which draws heavily on #GamerGate, alt-right, and white nationalist discourse and propaganda, Sweden is a progressive liberal country that is facing its downfall due to its acquiescence to feminist and leftist elements in its society, elements which in turn have invited foreign elements in the form of mass immigration that has turned the country into an unsafe and crime-ridden nation out of control.[152] This fantasy image of Sweden becomes the perfect scapegoat for those seeking additional explanations for the supposedly "forced diversity" in *Battlefield 1*. Based on this view, one of the reasons for the game's diversity is "because Dice is Swedish and the Swedes are delusional leftists and historical revisionists, look at what's happening to their country with the migrants" writes one Battlefield.com user. Answering the question "Why is there a black man on the cover?", the most popular answer in a thread on Reddit is "because the studio is swedish... what did you expect, they are very keen on pushing a liberal agenda". When one user in a different Reddit thread points out that the inclusion of soldiers of color is "definitely a strange choice", another user reminds them not to "forget that DICE is based in sweden." This phenomenon is repeated across several threads on Reddit where the most popular answers are consistently reminding its readers that DICE is Swedish, often provoking responses that agree with the sentiment or that elaborate on the original answer with further complaints about DICE and the imaginary Sweden. On YouTube, an aggressive commenter exclaimed that, "Of course it was a Swedish company that decides it wants to show a European war fought by non-Europeans[.] Just nuke yourself already Sweden, nothing of value will be lost".[153]

In addition to an imaginary dystopian Sweden being used as an explanation by commenters, the unwanted inclusion of soldiers of color was also attributed to one of the great specters of the far-right: the "Cultural Marxism" conspiracy

152 For an accessible summary of Sweden in the far-right imagination, see Chloe Colliver et al., *Smearing Sweden: International Influence Campaigns in the 2018 Swedish Election* (London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue and London School of Economics, 2018).

153 SyfruitCamelia, July 9, 2016, comment on SwiggityStagg, "Historical British Army Statistics Regarding Coloured Soldiers," *Battlefield.com*, July 9, 2016, https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/comment/65956#Comment_65956; [deleted], June 13, 2016, comment on voteleave6911, "[BF1] Why is there a black man on the cover?," *Battlefield*, May 9, 2016, https://www.reddit.com/r/Battlefield/comments/4igq39/bf1_why_is_there_a_black_man_on_the_cover/d479ls6;JonServo, May 7, 2016, comment on "Battlefield 1 "black washing" the European hero's," https://www.reddit.com/r/gaming/comments/4i9ecx/battlefield_1_black_washing_the_european_heros/d2w7hru; [deleted], August 31, 2016, comment on "Battlefield 1 "black washing" the European hero's," https://www.reddit.com/r/gaming/comments/4i9ecx/battlefield_1_black_washing_the_european_heros/d74jfls/; NO_FUN_ALLOWED, September 1, 2016, comment on "Battlefield 1 Official Reveal Trailer," &lc=UgjO5OONrAgzd3gCoAEC.

theory. Rachel Busbridge et al. points out that one of the problems surrounding the conspiracy theory is that Cultural Marxism as a term has an older history within left-wing philosophical thought as a specific Marxist approach. However, the contemporary definition of "Cultural Marxism" as used by the far-right is an invention that dates to the early 1990s. Originally used by American ultraconservatives, the flexibility of the term has made it possible to apply it to a wide variety of uses by different right-wing groups in the United States and across the world, which has contributed to its popularity. In essence, the theory follows the pattern of global antisemitic conspiracy theories in that it posits that left-wing intellectuals have infiltrated everything from higher education to the game industry and are actively trying to destroy "Western civilization" in order to replace it with a decadent and multicultural "politically correct ideology" that has corrupted society in the West and manipulated the minds of the young and weak.[154] The conspiracy theory is often used in conjunction with other far-right talking points that have been discussed in this section. A representative example can be found on Battlefield.com where a user claims that "DICE/EA dont care about historical integrity or honesty. Theyve got your money and instead of being genuine and representing the people that did fight this war, theyve doubled down on their dose of cultural marxism. No wonder Sweden is falling apart, theyre deliberately committing cultural suicide."[155] One comment on Battlefield.com stands out in particular. In it, a user contemplates different explanations for the inclusion of soldiers of color in the game before proposing their own:

> Ok first I obviously have to calerfy no I'm not racist and no I don't really care about black, Asian or whatever soldiers are in the game.
>
> Now why they did this? Well maybe you could say it's because they wanted to appeal to a even bigger audience to try get more people of different race/background into buying and playing the game, which by the way is fine I don't see a problem with that at all.
>
> Or maybe, it's just out of chance and they didn't have a motivated reason to add Black and other racial groups. Which ok, fair enough if that's the case, but it's hard for me not to think that there was a political motive and push to this giving the current political and cultural climate we are living in.

154 As with many conspiracy theories, there are countless of variations and adaptations to local contexts. Rachel Busbridge et al., "Cultural Marxism: far-right conspiracy theory in Australia's culture wars," *Social Identities* 26, no. 2 (2020): 722–738.

155 Quango_3000, May 22, 2017, comment on zeldalinkring, "Russian Battalion of Death coming to multiplayer is stupid," *Battlefield.com*, May 22, 2017, https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/comment/860765/#Comment_860765.

> I shouldn't bring politics on a gaming trend at all, but just two words I keep thinking..... Cultural Marxism
>
> I'm still 17 so I'm properly not as informed or whatever on all this, I'm just giving my thoughts I wanted to share.[156]

The comment is a jumbled and apprehensive mess, seemingly unable to commit itself to the otherwise hateful discourse available elsewhere on the message board, but it is the last sentence that makes the comment noteworthy. It is a stark reminder that it is not only adults who are writing comments expressing their belief in far-right conspiracy theories, and an even more disturbing reminder of the increased far-right radicalization of teenagers online. The insecurity in the comment is palpable and I stop to wonder if they really understand the meaning of what they are trying to say.

After an open beta that lasted 10 days between August 30 and September 8, and that resulted in the biggest beta in EA's history at the time with 13.2 million participating players, *Battlefield 1* was released to the public on the October 21, 2016, to the PC, Xbox One, and PlayStation 4.[157] Commenters now turned into players and new controversies arose as the focus of the complaints turned from the depiction of an African American soldier on the cover art of the game to the diversity present in *Battlefield 1*'s multiplayer features.

In the base version of *Battlefield 1*, the multiplayer game modes take place in different settings in Europe and the Middle East between 1915 and 1918, with a heavy emphasis on the last year of the war. Depending on the map, the player can be assigned to play as soldiers from six different nations: The British Empire, the German Empire, the Kingdom of Italy, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Ottoman Empire, and the United States. After being assigned a side, the player can choose to play as one of four different "classes" (assault, support, medic, and scout), each with their own specific appearance and distinct weaponry and inventory. The scout class of the British Empire, the German Empire, and the United States (Figure 2.4) is represented by a soldier of African ancestry. In addition, the medic class of the British Empire is represented by a soldier from British India (Figure 2.5). Although some players criticized the presence of soldiers of color in general, continuing the trend that I have examined thus far, it would be the inclusion of black British and Afro-German soldiers that proved to be the most contentious issue.

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156 Starwars115115, "Regarding this subject..," *Battlefield.com*, February 22, 2017, https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/90163/regarding-this-subject.

157 Samit Sarkar, "Battlefield 1 open beta reached 13.2M players," *Polygon*, September 15, 2016, https://www.polygon.com/2016/9/15/12929034/battlefield-1-open-beta-players.

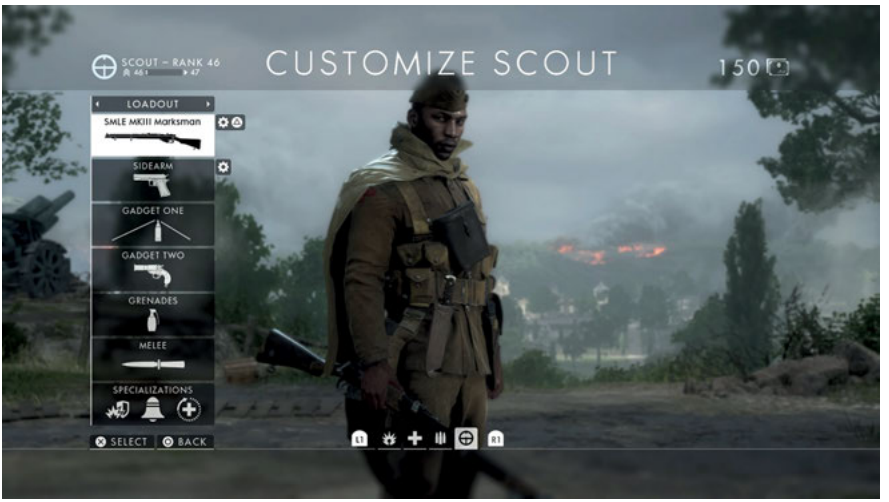

Figure 2.4: The African American scout on the "Ballroom Blitz" map.

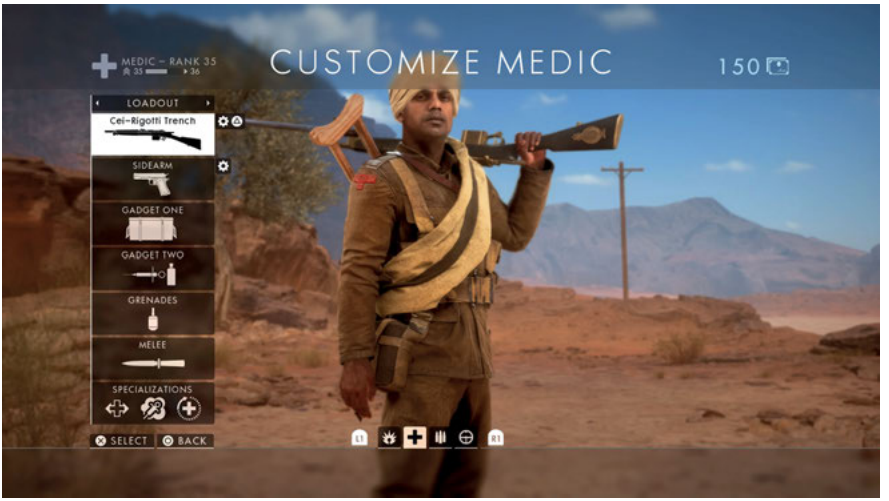

Figure 2.5: The British Indian medic on the "Sinai Desert" map.

As previously discussed in this section, the idea of the Western Front of the First World War as a specifically *European* (and thus *white*) war is dominant. The white mythic space of the First World War provides no other alternative but to imagine a war that is predominantly white. The urgent need to defend the white mythic space that *Battlefield 1*'s inclusions intruded upon reached a

fever pitch in the fall of 2016, coinciding with the release of the beta and subsequent launch of the game, which would continue until early spring 2017. The racist arguments and discourse that will be analyzed from this point in time overlap with the previous far-right discourse, but are considerably more common and frequent. A possible explanation for this would be that the multiplayer feature of *Battlefield 1*, in which players all around the world could face off against each other in small and large scale battles online, was the most popular feature of the game. The single player "War Stories" received considerably less attention overall and while there were online discussions about aspects of the single player mode, the majority of discussions are dedicated to the content of the game's multiplayer feature.

One such discussion concerned the question of customization of the soldier models. Although every class has its own distinct soldier models according to the assigned nation, every player selecting to play as a specific class will look identical to other players on the same team who are playing as the same class. Yet even the most innocent discussions about customization inevitably reached the point in which players began to complain about having to play as a soldier of color while no complaints were ever made about having to play as white soldiers. With no ability to change the race of the soldier model, cries of "forced diversity" resurfaced. The recurrent argument was that players, who more often than not identified themselves as being white, were forced to play as soldiers of color, referring to the white mythic space of the First World War as a justification for why they should only be allowed to play as white soldiers. Only four out of the 24 different soldier models spread over six different nations are non-white. The race of the classes that players select to play as has no impact on the gameplay and since the player controls their character from a first-person point of view at all times, unless they focus exclusively on the character's hands (in some cases wearing gloves), they would not be able to discern if they are playing as a white or non-white soldier. "Its like WW1 Africa, even at main loading screen we got a black soldier! I know there were some africans fighting in WW1 etc, but I can't find even option to change my own soldier to be white....-cause you know...I am white... Its set on african by default, i am not freaking black why would I play as a black soldier?" wrote one player on Battlefield.com, bridging the complaints of commenters who argued against the inclusion of an African American soldier on the cover art (who now also appeared on the main loading screen) and the players who now found out that they were "forced" to play as soldiers of color in the multiplayer.[158] They were joined by other players

158 Saraliman, "Great game, but tired of black people everywhere...," *Battlefield.com*, October

who asked if "German scouts have to play as the black guy? I'm not racist and I can understand why someone might want to play as a black guy if they're black, but will there be an option to change his skin color/face if you want to go for historical accuracy?", "What's with the near-absence of Caucasian soldiers in Western European factions? Forcing diversity for diversity's sake is just silly," or if they "have to play as a black german or turban wearing british? Or can I customize them to be authentically european? Because it removes a level of realism for me and thus makes the game less enjoyable if I am forced to play as these historically inaccurate characters." ChristerKrafft on Battlefield.com exasperatedly sought assistance by exclaiming, "Help! Im not a racist but i dont want to be black!", adding that they "often play as german.but my user is always showed with the absolutely wrong skin complexion, and this bothers me very much! I have tried to find some button or something in options, but nothing." The player grew increasingly agitated in the discussion thread, ultimately arguing that "i just dont want political correctness making a mockery of people that prefer keeping in sync with reality."[159]

That supposed reality is a white reality, anchored in the rules of the white mythic space that shunned non-white bodies as inauthentic, unrealistic, and unwanted in a perceived white space. Despite attempts of shielding themselves from possible accusations of racism, their discomfort at being "forced" to play as non-white characters cannot be interpreted in any other way. These players hide themselves behind the white mythic space of the First World War, upholding it as proof of the validity of their complaints. The notion of historical accuracy and realism, rooted in the white mythic space as a model of authenticity, is continuously called upon in order to enforce legitimacy. Common arguments for the rejection of soldiers of color in the context of the multiplayer features are often based on the history of the First World War, whether indirectly (e. g. vague calls of historical accuracy or realism) or directly in the form of (often-

13, 2016, https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/35832/great-game-but-tired-of-black-people-everywhere. The user also adds a dash of far-right discourse by adding that, "They [black people] took EU now taking games?"

159 BristledJohnnies, "Will German scouts have to play as the black guy?," *Battlefield_One*, August 15, 2016, https://www.reddit.com/r/battlefield_one/comments/4xueqi/will_german_scouts_have_to_play_as_the_black_guy/; Ransurias, "About DICE's concept of diversity in Battlefield 1," *Battlefield.com*, July 1, 2016, https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/4940/about-dices-concept-of-diversity-in-battlefield-1; sohiiee, August 24, 2016, comment on DMckMedic, "Battlefield 1 Soldier Customization," *Battlefield.com*, August 23, 2016, https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/comment/128000/#Comment_128000; ChristerKrafft, "Help! Im not a racist but i dont want to be black!," *Battlefield.com*, December 13, 2016, https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/71338/help-im-not-a-racist-but-i-dont-want-to-be-black.

times erroneous) historical facts that support a specific vision of the war that sees it as a "white man's war". This often begins with players delineating two separate historical spheres with no apparent overlap: a white, European sphere and a black, African sphere. The middle ground between these two spheres is sometimes populated by an Anglo-Indian presence and more commonly by a racialized United States. On Battlefield.com, user Slothman672 wrote that,

> I have just spoken with a customer support staff and was told to come here and that they would send this to EA but my complaint is that in BF1 there is an unrealistic representation of Africans in Europe as well as Indians. This was a war that had very few Africans aside from the US. The fact that two classes on the German side are black (scout and cavalry) does not make sense considering there were barely any in Germany at all. Same applies to the French. I am aware the Indians fought for the British but this would not apply to being in Europe. I am not opposed to having other races in the game but it would make more sense to have them perhaps on the US side. I hope Dice does something about this.[160]

Black soldiers, in the eyes of many players who wrote comments echoing Slothman672's complaint, can only be Africans from the African continent. While Africans can be "from the US" (where it "make more sense to have them"), they can otherwise only be "in Europe", not from there. As one user on Reddit stated, "It's realistic to have more black soldiers on the American team, because of the Harlem Hellfighters and the U.S. has a higher black population than any of the other nations. The only thing that bothers me about black people in BF1 is that there should be very few if any at all fighting for the non-American factions."[161] Race, in particular blackness, is seen as geographically fixed. Any black soldier in the context of the First World War, with the exception of the African American soldier, must therefore be a colonial soldier. The conceptualization of black soldiers as colonial soldiers from European colonies in Africa is in turn used as an exclusionary argument for why black soldiers should not be represented in the game. During the war, Great Britain did not send non-white colonial forces from their African colonies to the Western front as combat soldiers on the basis of prejudice (white South Africans, for example, were allowed to fight) and Germany was prevented from transporting any soldiers from their African colonies to Europe due to the blockade imposed on the country by the Entente powers, in addition to the

160 Slothman672, "Unrealistic representation of other races in WWI," *Battlefield.com*, March 30, 2017, https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/comment/766817.

161 Meme2dank, "Black Soldiers in Battlefield 1," *Battlefield_One*, January 25, 2017, https://www.reddit.com/r/battlefield_one/comments/5q14su/black_soldiers_in_battlefield_1/.

invasion of its African territories.[162] Ikhor91 spoke for many users on Battlefield.com when they expressed that "I think there is an over-representation of colonial troops in this game." Another player, who claimed to have extensively studied the First World War, stated that "Black Africans did not serve where they are portrayed in the game," while another user referred to the blockade on Germany as justification for why black soldiers should not be represented, concluding that *Battlefield 1*'s diversity "was absolutely intentional to appeal to black audience, disregarding history." One user even gave their solution to the customization controversy by suggesting that DICE should have "Colonial (African) soldiers fight on an African map. That would be more natural and true to history. Have the Europeans and Indians fight in Europe."[163]

In one specific case, the focus of the complaint is moved away from the Western front to the Middle East. The complaint uses many of the same arguments that had been previously used by other players, but the comment is unique in its display of the complex intersection of national historical memory and identity, dominant historical narratives, and the white mythic space of the First World War:

> As an Irish citizen, the first World War plays a big part in our national history and identity, it fully awakened our national consciousness that would boil over into rebellion after the wars end. The Sinai- Palestine campaign was fought, on the British side, by divisions conscripted in large from Ireland, thousands of Irish died in the conflict. None, yes none, zip, zero of the divisions utilized in the campaign drew on sub-saharan African territories, and yet instead of being able to play as an Irishman fighting alongside his British, Aussie, and Indian brothers in arms, I'm forced to play as a group that made up a very insignifigant part of the British imperial military. African forces were primarily garrisoned in their home colonies. If a battle takes place in east Africa where tens of thousands of African british troops

162 For an overview of the First World War in Africa, see Strachan, *The First World War in Africa*, and Melvin E. Page, ed., *African and the First World War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1987).

163 Ikhor91, "Why are there black German soldiers in this game?," *Battlefield.com*, January 15, 2017, https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/81939/why-are-there-black-german-soldiers-in-this-game; MathewGurney, December 5, 2016, comment on jocasrp, "How accurate is bf1?," *Battlefield.com*, December 4, 2016, https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/comment/488663#Comment_488663; BiohazardBGR, October 30, 2016, comment on DMckMedic, "Battlefield 1 Soldier Customization," https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/comment/337172/#Comment_337172; koffieslikker, August 31, 2016, comment on koffieslikker, "Battlefield 1 is racist," *Battlefield.com*, August 31, 2016, https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/comment/147626/#Comment_147626.

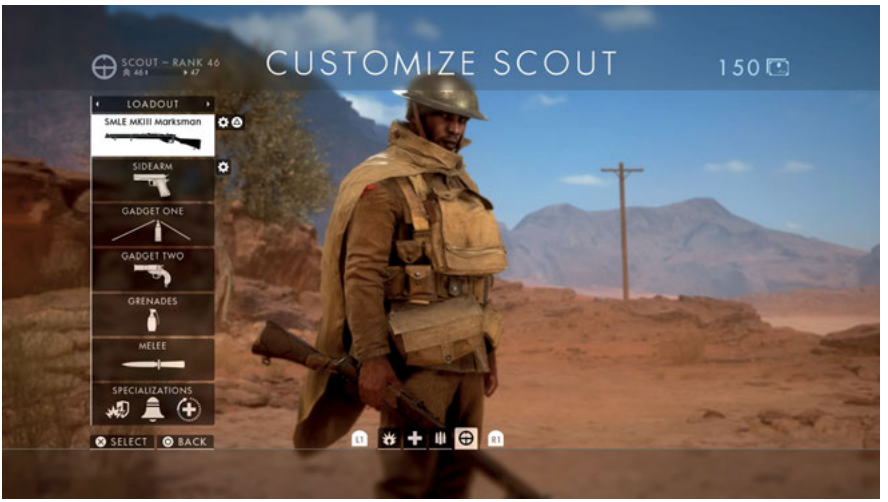

Figure 2.6: Black British scout on the "Sinai Desert" map.

> lost their lives, then I'll expect to play as an African, but otherwise, give me the Brits, the Irish, and the Indians![164]

This view is wholly dependent on whiteness being the principal expectation with a token non-white presence (three soldiers out of four "should be white", the player expresses in a different comment).[165] The Irishman that the player so desperately wants to play as cannot be black, nor can the black British soldier (Figure 2.6) actually depicted in the game be. The Australian brother-in-arm could not possibly be indigenous. In the notion of being "forced" to play as black soldiers, we can hear echoes of the need to "respect" the participation (and the sacrifice) of white soldiers, in this case Irish soldiers who were a minority in their own right within the greater British Army. Yet this same sentiment of respect is not extended by players to the black British soldiers in British regiments or the soldiers of the British West Indian Regiment that saw action against the Ottoman Empire in the Middle East. More often than not, they are rejected as insignificant or irrelevant since they were supposedly never present in the first place.

The argument that soldiers of color are overrepresented is tied to the thought that they had an insignificant presence in First World War armies (if their histor-

164 Pietrus_WoT, "Soldier Customization or Historical Accuracy," *Battlefield.com*, September 6, 2016, https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/comment/190212.
165 Pietrus_WoT, September 6, 2016, comment on "Soldier Customization," https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/comment/190358/#Comment_190358.

ical existence is acknowledged at all), subsequently not "deserving" to be represented in the game. In comment after comment, the participation of soldiers of color is downplayed and marginalized in order to uphold what can only be called an appropriate "white-to-black ratio" in the game. To strengthen such arguments, players turned to statistics and numbers, real or imagined, in order to show the perceived disparity between white and non-white soldiers in the game.

An obsession with numbers is nothing new to the historical memory of the First World War. Dan Todman writes of how figures have been used for dramatic effect in documentaries, memorials, and popular culture to emphasize the horror and catastrophe of the war. This is often performed by presenting specific mass casualty and death numbers counted into the millions as well as casualty rates according to country – often employing inaccurate numbers. In the original stage version of *Oh, What A Lovely War!* (1963), an electronic message board was used to inform the audience of the terrifying toll the war had (supposedly) taken on Great Britain's male population, all in order to push the play's message.[166] After all, any popular treatment of the First World War would feel amiss without the obligatory mention of British casualties on the first day of the Battle of the Somme (20,000 dead, 40,000 wounded) or a mention of how little ground (whether counted in meters or yards) that this army or that army managed to fruitlessly gain in a battle (often used alongside numbers of casualties). Figures and statistics go hand-in-hand with the mythologization of the First World War as a gruesome tragedy.

In the context of *Battlefield 1*, figures are used to emphasize the white mythic space. "Blacks where less than .02% of the German empire and only fought in the colonies but in this game they are 25% of the characters on the German side, what gives? [...] They where also less than 6% of the US population and probably accounted for less than 1% of the soldiers during the war," argued one user in a comment that is representative of this type of comment. In a similar comment, user Verwoerd01 wrote a long post criticizing the racial inclusion as inaccurate, claiming for example that "over 100 000 Indians did serve in France and Belgium, but when you take into count the 8.9 million troops that Britain did use during the war, they are still a minority." Verwoerd01 was joined by SwiggityStagg in a different thread where they included a detailed list of statistics "Regarding Coloured Soldiers" in the British Army ("England: 4,006,158 [...] Canada: 418,035"), concluding in a separate comment that, "More whites fought, more

166 Todman, *The Great War*, 63–67.

whites should be shown that's my opinion."[167] Yet not all comments attempted to be specific. It was common to find vague comments claiming that it was rare to encounter non-white soldiers on the Western front and that soldiers of color "only appeared in very limited numbers in the European theater and the vast majority of soldiers were European. So it's kind of funny how only 1 of the 4 class models are actually white."[168]

These arguments are working with the assumption that it was the intention of DICE that the four soldier models were meant to be an exact representation of the specific racial demographics of the individual armies. This is a false assumption that is projected onto the game because of the need by certain players to defend the white mythic space of the First World War and their own discomfort with being "forced" to play as a non-white soldier. The assumption is contradicted by DICE's public commitment of showing the diversity and unknown aspects of the First World War in *Battlefield 1*. Unlike the reoccurring arguments by players trying to marginalize soldiers of color, nowhere is a soldier of color "forced" into a national army where they were not present in reality. The United States, the British Empire, and the German Empire all had soldiers of color in their ranks on the Western front. Furthermore, the accusation of an "overrepresentation" of non-white soldiers in the game is an exaggeration when you consider that white soldier models are in an indisputable majority across the available nations in the game, with the sole exception being the British army where two out of every four soldiers are represented by a non-white soldier. Yet the purpose of these arguments is not to provide an "accurate" racial ratio, but rather to legitimize controlling the presence of non-white bodies (in particularly black bodies) in order to keep them in the margins where it "makes more sense" for them to be. The tactic of using figures and statistics, real or imagined, to minimize the presence of people of color to the point of insignificance is a common tactic used by adherents of white mythic spaces to deny the presence of non-white bodies. The individual white body is seen as valuable and important, and is often granted an

167 Odinsrighthand88, October 25, 2016, comment on vsleron, "Character Customization, we need it!)," *Battlefield.com*, October 25, 2016, https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/comment/306751/#Comment_306751; Verwoerd01, "Race in Battlefield 1 and how inaccurate it truly is," *Battlefield.com*, November 30, 2016, https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/67252/race-in-battlefield-1-and-how-inaccurate-it-truly-is; SwiggityStagg, "Historical British Army Statistics Regarding Coloured Soldiers," *Battlefield.com*, July 9, 2016, https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/comment/66120; SwiggityStagg, July 9, 2016, comment on "Historical British Army Statistics," https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/comment/66120#Comment_66120.

168 TacticulBacon, July 1, 2016, comment on "About DICE's concept of diversity in Battlefield 1," https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/comment/47089/#Comment_47089.

individualized and positive representation, while non-white bodies are considered as a faceless and dehumanized mass. In the context of *Battlefield 1*, white uniformed bodies are venerated as symbols of respectable veterans and of a shared transnational white martial history. Some players are even able to identify their own past and family history in this representation. Non-white uniformed bodies on the other hand pose a dilemma for those players whose worldview sees men in uniform as being worthy of respect and appreciation. Instead of granting an equal amount of respect to non-white soldiers, they resort to active denial or marginalization. If the participation of non-white soldiers was insignificant or an outright fantasy forced into the historical setting then non-white soldiers do not deserve to be acknowledged in the game or respected as First World War participants or veterans. What should be respected, they argue, is historical accuracy.

The notion of "historical accuracy" (or even commonly used derivatives, such as "historical realism") as it relates to video games and other similar media is complicated. Kempshall argues that neither producers nor those who play First World War games actually desire authenticity in its strict meaning, but are rather more interested in what Kempshall calls authenticity lite – "a form of moderate authenticity that captures the spirit of how we believe the war was. It is an authenticity of technical details [...] It is the constructed authenticity of ephemera and emotional context."[169] It is a visual authenticity that is the goal. Furthermore, as Kempshall points out, the player engaging with a historical video game enters into a contract in which the player has to be willing to suspense their disbelief. However, "it can only be suspended so far as long as the game itself does not break the immersion."[170]

The white mythic space of the First World War serves as a model of authenticity that players can use in order to gauge the degrees of historical accuracy in *Battlefield 1*. In similarity with authenticity lite, the visual aspects remain vital but it is the visual markers of race, specifically non-white bodies, that take precedence in judging the realism of the game and to what extent the immersion of the players is tested. Yet it is immediately clear that the presence of black soldiers is a reoccurring obstacle for some players' immersion into the historical setting. A representative comment from Battlefield.com user LastActionBiebo provides us with an insight into a common concern:

> Here's the thing: Bolt-action rifles were the most common service rifles in ww1. When you think ww1, you think bolt-action rifles, right? 99,999% of all german soldiers used them

169 Kempshall, *The First World War in Computer Games*, 7–8.

170 Kempshall, "War collaborators," 3.

> and 99,999% were white europeans. And the only dude who's allowed to carry them is african? Please don't get me wrong. I'm not a racist. I just find it very immersion breaking when you have trenchline full of shooters and every single one of them is african. When i play a game about samurais, i want them to be japanese. When i play a game about african tribes, i want them to be black. It's about atmosphere. Not a single racist thing about it.[171]

Here, the user falls back on the authenticity of technical details in the shape of period accurate bolt-action rifles to strengthen their argument that it is wrong to arm black soldiers with them and that the presence of said black soldiers (referenced only as "African") breaks their immersion. Despite avowing racism, the user still centers race as important to the game's "atmosphere" which in their view is "99,999%" white European. The user also resorts to using representation in hypothetical games to push their point: *Battlefield 1* should be white, just like a Samurai game should be Asian or a game about "African tribes" should be black. These hypotheticals are common arguments used to reject soldiers of color from the game, with some users going as far as to exaggerate the hypotheticals to the point of fiction. In a thread complaining about the presence of soldiers of color, one user argued that, "WW1 did happen and Millions of People died for it. If you guys say immersion and reality breaking are ok then what about include a ION CANNON or AK47 into this game? Sounds like a ridiculous paradox right?" The visuals of non-white men in uniform in the game is equated to the hypothetical presence of an ion cannon from the *Star Wars* films and the Cold War-era AK-47 assault rifle. Soldiers of color are consequently seen just as fictional, anachronistic, and out of place in a First World War setting as a science fiction weapon. The user concludes by stating that DICE "should respect the dead in WW1," further adding that, "Millions of WHITE boys fought bravely and died on the WW1 battlefield. They should be respected but your design made their sacrifice like a joke!"[172] The importance of white, authentic bodies is again emphasized over the supposedly fictional non-white bodies, in combination with an anger over the neglected and disrespected white representation in similarity with other comments made by players. The notion of historical inaccuracy as a lack of respect is a phenomena that can be found deeper into the past of First World War gaming. Kempshall points out that long before the First World War games of the centenary, "some players possessed the belief

171 LastActionBiebo, "Option to change the soldiers ethnicity," *Battlefield.com*, June 18, 2017, https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/111882/option-to-change-the-soldiers-ethnicity.
172 Bigstudy, "Needs RESPECT and take Responsibility!," *Battlefield.com*, October 27, 2016, https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/47773/needs-respect-and-take-responsibility.

that a lack of authenticity also reflected a lack of due respect and deference to soldiers who had participated in the war."[173] Among a select part of the *Battlefield 1* player base, the dismay over a lack of appropriate respect and deference to soldiers is denounced along racial lines. It is *white* soldiers, they remind us, who are the victims of historical inaccuracy and who are being disrespected by the inclusion of non-white soldiers.

Are the *Battlefield 1* players under investigation truly interested in historical accuracy? Players anchoring their understanding of the visual aesthetic of the First World War in the white mythic space are, as we have previously seen, arguably very concerned about a specific form of authenticity that rationalizes white hegemony. It is at this point that whiteness as a marker of authenticity begins to clash with traditional notions of historical accuracy and authenticity lite. Like other games of its genre, *Battlefield 1* features a vast array of historical weapons, gadgets, and vehicles that players can use and control as they engage each other in virtual battles. Alongside well-known period specific weapons, such as the British Lee Enfield rifle and the German Gewehr 98 rifle, are obscure weapons such as the Austro-Hungarian Hellriegel submachine gun and the Italian Cei-Rigotti automatic rifle. While the former were produced and distributed in the millions, the latter were never used in the war. In fact, the Hellriegel never actually existed as anything but a prototype. Weapons that only existed in the thousands if not in the hundreds during the First World War proliferate in the game alongside weapons that were never used in the war at all. The A7V, the German version of the recently invented tank, only had 20 of them built, yet the A7V has a visible presence in the multiplayer feature. These examples of some of the inclusions in the game test authenticity lite to its limits, as authentic technical details are challenged in order to make the game fun to play. Kempshall remarks that, "A game that sought to accurately recreate the world wars would be simultaneously incredibly dull and also incredibly offensive."[174]

What becomes evident, however, is that when having to make a choice between a game that follows a watered-down version of authenticity lite and a game following the white mythic space of the First World War, some players heavily prefer the latter. Players can accept the inclusion of weapons that were never used in the war and simultaneously refuse to consider the presence of soldiers of color. "Automatic weapons, tanks, planes were added to the game to make it an actual playable battlefield game, black scouts on the British and German side have no effect on gameplay except ruin immersion," is how one player

173 Kempshall, "War collaborators," 7.

174 Kempshall, *The First World War in Computer Games*, 7–8.

rationalized this idea.[175] Another user argued that "players can be immersed in a ww1 game with smgs, because its all taken out of context. players can believe that a gun that was invented slightly after the war could have been use[d] [...] [but] having a black german breaks immersion," further adding that "the whole definition of immersion is a believable experience."[176] The sight and widespread visible use of a Hellriegel or a Cei-Rigotti can therefore be justified on account of it supposedly contributing to the game while the historically accurate inclusion of a black British soldier would ruin the player's immersion into the First World War setting. One player even goes as far as to prefer breaking with authenticity lite completely in favor of the exclusion of non-white soldiers, writing that they were "sure that blacks did not comprise 40 % of those who fought. British scout black, American scout black, german scout black, italian medic or support black. So much about realism and immersion. [...] I would rather have my character dirty, with lice he needs to scratch every 10 secs in middle of fire fight along with a strong case of TB which kills him at random."[177] These contradictory notions of historical accuracy come together to deny any space for soldiers of color. A continuity of whiteness takes precedence over historical authenticity because it is considered natural, an indisputable fact, through the perspective granted by the white mythic space. The authenticity and subsequent immersion that white bodies grant a historical representation is supposedly ruined by the presence of foreign, non-white bodies. As Battlefield.com user MarxistDictator explains:

> Immersive experience is not 'oh you can't respawn and no revives and you have to actually mechanically fix tanks haha' and all these other ridiculous strawman notions you think of (the word you're looking for is realistic, which isn't what people want) it's even more basic than that. It's playing as an army with an identity that would be assumed of that given nation.[178]

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175 Zozeberry, March 11, 2017, comment on Zozeberry, "Petition to DICE," *Battlefield.com*, March 11, 2017, https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/comment/724424/#Comment_724424.

176 Snakeheadinvade, July 13, 2016, comment on snakeheadinvade, "im sorry, but these soldier models look goofy," *Battlefield.com*, July 12, 2016, https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/comment/75836/#Comment_75836.

177 Arbiter225, October 19, 2016, comment on freddiebox, "More Customization!," *Battlefield.com*, October 19, 2016, https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/comment/270978/#Comment_270978.

178 MarxistDictator, July 16, 2017, comment on incapslap, "Tsar DLC info and stream from Westie," *Battlefield.com*, July 15, 2017, https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/comment/928213/#Comment_928213.

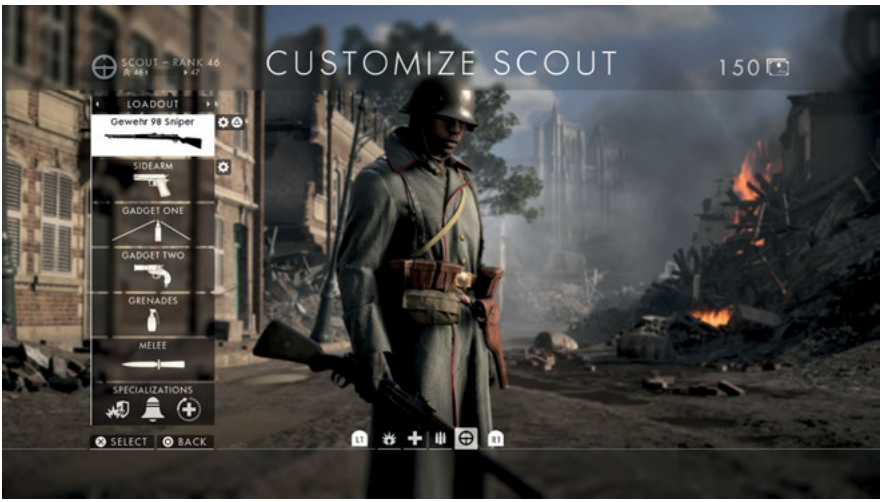

Figure 2.7: Afro-German scout on the "Amiens" map.

The question of identity is particularly relevant when discussing the racist backlash surrounding the inclusion of an Afro-German soldier (Figure 2.7) in the game. No other inclusion in the game garnered the same amount of anger and vitriolic attacks than the sight of a man of African ancestry wearing a German uniform. Although countless of threads on Battlefield.com and Reddit complained about a general non-white presence in the game, many of these threads explicitly targeted the Afro-German soldier model. Questions such as "Why is the German scout dark skinned?" and requests to "Change this colored german soldiers pls!" were very common after the release of *Battlefield 1*.[179] While most of these posts were direct in their requests for a change, some posts tied in their questioning of the presence of a non-white German soldier with their preconceived ideas about the early twentieth century German demographics and identity. Battlefield.com user NinetyMIKE expressed their discomfort by stating that, "It bothers me, when you think of German soldiers during the 20th century the last thing that comes to mind are Africans, especially during any campaign in

179 Nebula666, "Why is the German scout dark skinned?," *Battlefield_One*, November 28, 2016, https://www.reddit.com/r/battlefield_one/comments/5fabw6/why_is_the_german_scout_dark_skinned/; CONVEEEN, "Change this colored german soldiers pls!," *Battlefield.com*, October 31, 2016, https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/50763/change-this-colored-german-soldiers-pls.

Europe. Who could possibly think this is ok?"[180] Some users tied it to the conspiratorial thinking that DICE was pushing a political agenda and falsifying history through the inclusion of an Afro-German soldier, writing for example that, "Political correctness – rewriting history! Black germans in the early 1900th gotta be the funniest one," and "What i find completely insane and pathetic is your attempt to promote it [political correctness] even further by placing black soldiers into German empire army ... that is complete **** and historicaly inaccurate. WHAT THE ACTUAL **** ..."[181] At the core of all arguments surrounding Afro-Germans is the idea that they do not and should not have a place in *Battlefield 1* because they are perceived as not belonging in Germany of the 1910s. Players therefore resort to seeing the inclusion of Afro-Germans as a mockery of historical Germans. One user, for example, asked, "seriously a black german sniper?? you try to make the game as realistic as you can with all the weapons, air warfare, tanks, and graphics but you do something stupid like that and disrespect german culture and falsify something like that not impressed with dice at all."[182] Another Battlefield.com user, BigStudy, wrote a thread with the title "Needs RESPECT and take Responsibility!" in which they expressed their concern about the history contained in the game and the possible impact the representation of the war might have on those who play it but who do not know the history of the First World War:

> Moreover, this game is not just a game. It sold millions copy and has become a carrier of history and culture. All players of this game didn't take part in WW1, and some of them started to know WW1 from this game. So Dev team you are making a big mistake of misleading people! I don't care about this because I know what the history is. But when my son plays this, he asked me "why many german soldiers are Black?... Is Germany an African nation?" What would I answer him? Should I say because DEV team like this? So you Dev should understand you are not making just a game but also taking responsibility of transferring history and culture to next generation! So be cautious about your design! This is serious![183]

180 NinetyMIKE, "Please explain the German Sniper class," *Battlefield.com*, October 13, 2016, https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/35556/please-explain-the-german-sniper-class.

181 Vic_R0cks, March 27, 2017, comment on DarthRazzor, "Race of Soldiers in Game," *Battlefield.com*, March 27, 2017, https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/comment/762271/#Comment_762271; Pan_Kalich, "Historical inaccuracy VS Racism VS common sense," *Battlefield.com*, November 4, 2016, https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/53447/historical-inaccuracy-vs-racism-vs-common-sense.

182 Ty15ler, "a black german sniper???," *Battlefield.com*, November 5, 2016, https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/comment/367127.

183 BigStudy, "Needs RESPECT and take Responsibility!"

Racialized notions of national identity, like those expressed by the commenters, remain a common problem faced by people of African ancestry in Europe. The act of being placed outside of the nation, as a stranger or a foreigner, and being questioned about your presence in your home ("Where are you *really* from?") are examples of everyday racism that Afro-Germans have to face. Grada Kilomba explains it as a "fantasy of incompatibility", a form of cultural racism that see blackness and German-ness as two contradictory categories – you cannot be both, only one. Kilomba further elaborates on the rationale behind asking the questioning of the Afro-German presence, drawing on the personal experiences of Alicia, an Afro-German woman, by writing that, "The repetitive enquiry illustrates the *white* desire to make Alicia irreconcilable with the nation; whenever she is asked, she is being denied authentic national membership on the basis of 'race'." Kilomba attributes it to a white fear of acknowledging that Germany has an Afro-German history. When answering that she is Afro-German, Alicia's response is not listened to and her foreignness is insisted upon by white Germans, often with accompanying laughter. Kilomba concludes: "The sound of contemptuous *white* laughter announce how the *white* subject is, de facto, invested in the fantasy that only *whites* can be German and that Germany is *white* – a fantasy that rules their reality."[184]

At its core, the racialized notion of national identity in relation to Afro-Germans is a colonial fantasy, a fantasy that ironically reveals the longer history of the black presence in Germany.[185] The history of people of African ancestry in Germany is occasionally considered to have begun with the deployment of French colonial soldiers on German soil during the French occupation of the Rhineland after the First World War, some of whom entered into relationships with German women and whose unions produced biracial children. The presence of colonial soldiers from French West and North Africa produced an intensely international racist campaign in the early 1920s on behalf of the German government, the "Black Horror on the Rhine", that accused African soldiers of committing widespread crimes and that helped to solidify the idea of Germany as a homogenously white nation.[186] Yet the view that Afro-German history began in

184 Grada Kilomba, *Plantation Memories: Episodes of Everyday Racism* (Münster: UNRAST-Verlag, 2010), 64–67.

185 Tina M. Campt, "Converging Spectres of an Other within: Race and Gender in Prewar Afro-German History," *Callaloo* 26, no. 2 (2003): 322–341.

186 On the Rhineland occupation and the "Black Horror on the Rhine", see Iris Wigger, *The 'Black Horror on the Rhine': Intersections of Race, Nation, Gender and Class in 1920s Germany* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017). On the prevalence of racialized notions of national identity in Germany after the 1920s through the 1950s, see Julia Roos, "An Afro-German Microhistory:

the aftermath of the First World War or that Afro-Germans are a modern phenomenon, in similarity with the belief that black British history began with the arrival of immigrants from the British West Indies on the SS *Empire Windrush* in 1948, is wrong and disguises a history that goes back centuries, not decades. Since the thirteenth century, people of African ancestry have been present in German-speaking lands. In this, they joined a greater black presence in Europe where people of African ancestry could be found in the most famed royal courts and the most obscure rural villages. There was even a time when black British men and women became Afro-Germans through migration, such as with the case of the formerly enslaved men of African ancestry who fought alongside Hessian soldiers during the American War of Independence (1775 – 1783) and who together with their families moved to Germany at the end of the war, ultimately settling in Hesse-Kassel for a new life.[187] The increased black presence in Germany during the nineteenth century was a consequence of Imperial Germany's colonial expansion in Africa that ended with the outbreak of the First World War. Men and women from Togoland, Kamerun, and other German colonies in Africa arrived in Germany as laborers, entertainers, students, visitors, businessmen, and diplomats. Some came as adult individuals, while other came as entire families or as young children who would come to grow up in German society. This "colonial generation" of Afro-Germans is described as "notoriously *discontinuous*" by Robbie Aitken and Eve Rosenhaft, explaining that they "were dispersed, reduced in numbers and largely forgotten by the 1950s."[188]

It was from this generation where the men of African ancestry who fought for Germany on the Western front and the Middle East in the First World War came from. Unlike black British soldiers, whose experiences in regular British regiments during the war has been researched and written about by historians such as David Killingray, Jacqueline Jenkinson, and Ray Costello, and popularized by Stephen Bourne, no similar research has been done for Afro-German sol-

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Gender, Religion, and the Challenges of Diasporic Dwelling," *Central European History* 49 (2016): 240 – 260.

187 Mischa Honeck, Martin Klimke, and Anne Kuhlmann, "Introduction," in Honeck, Klimke, and Kuhlmann, *Germany and the Black Diaspora*, 1 – 20; Maria I. Diedrich, "From American Slaves to Hessian Subjects: Silenced Black Narratives of the American Revolution," in Honeck, Klimke, and Kuhlmann, *Germany and the Black Diaspora*, 92 – 111.

188 Aitken and Rosenhaft, *Black Germany,* 1 – 66; Robbie Aitken, "A transient presence: black visitors and sojourners in Imperial Germany, 1884 – 1914," *Immigrants & Minorities* 34, no. 3 (2016): 233 – 255; Robbie Aitken, "Education and Migration: Cameroonian Schoolchildren and Apprentices in Germany, 1884 – 1914," in Honeck, Klimke, and Kuhlmann, *Germany and the Black Diaspora*, 213 – 230.

diers.[189] A major reason for the difficulty in researching both black British and Afro-German participation in the First World War is the scarcity of source material. Unlike the United States, soldiers enlisting in European armies rarely had their race mentioned, making the process of identifying individual soldiers of color difficult and often resulting in an archival invisibility.[190] Although historians can only speculate as to how many soldiers of color served in otherwise all-white European regiments during the First World War, it is an indisputable fact that they were present and more names are continuously added to an increasing list of known soldiers of colors in European armies through ongoing research. In the case of Germany, men of African ancestry have a long history of serving as soldiers, from the army of Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II in the thirteenth century through to the eighteenth century Prussian army and up to (and beyond) the First World War. In similarity to their white counterparts, the black men who served in the German army during the First World War came from a variety of backgrounds that ranged from Prince Alexandre Douala Manga Bell of the Duala people to Joseph Bilé, a future Comintern activist.[191] In some cases, we have visual evidence but without a name to attribute to the face staring back at us, as in the case of the anonymous Afro-German soldier depicted in a photograph confidently standing together with his white comrades of the Landwehr-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 25.[192] The prominent *Feldmütze* that the Afro-German soldier wears in the photograph hints that it might have served as the original inspiration for the inclusion of Afro-German soldiers in *Battlefield 1*, as conceptual art of the German scout class shows that, instead of a helmet, the soldier was originally depicted as wearing a *Feldmütze*. Furthermore, DICE's concept art for the game shows that racial diversity was something that was present in

189 David Killingray, "All the King's Men? Blacks in the British Army in the First World War, 1914–1918," in *Under the Imperial Carpet: Essays in Black History 1780–1950*, ed. Rainer Lotz and Ian Pegg (Crawley: Rabbit Press, 1986), 164–181; Jacqueline Jenkinson, "'All in the Same Uniform'? The Participation of Black Colonial Residents in the British Armed Forces in the First World War," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 40, no. 2 (2012): 207–230; Costello, *Black Tommies*; Stephen Bourne, *Black Poppies: Britain's Black Community and the Great War* (Cheltenham: The History Press, 2019).

190 Costello, *Black Tommies*, 45–49.

191 Otele, *African Europeans*, 20, 137–140; Aitken and Rosenhaft, *Black Germany*, 176; Robbie Aitken, "From Cameroon to Germany and Back via Moscow and Paris: The Political Career of Joseph Bilé (1892–1959), Performer, "Negerarbeiter" and Comintern Activist," *Journal of Contemporary History* 43, no. 4 (2008): 597–616.

192 Joe Robinson, "ps1342," *Flickr*, May 3, 2011, https://www.flickr.com/photos/joerookery/5685472333/.

the game's vision from the beginning. The German scout class was always meant to be represented by an Afro-German soldier.[193]

When faced with the historical fact that there were men of African ancestry wearing German uniform outside of Africa during the First World War, supporters of the white mythic space resorted to either outright denial (continuing the argument that black soldiers only fought in Africa or that there were no Afro-Germans in the early twentieth century) or reluctant acknowledgement. The latter approach was accompanied by efforts to minimize the historical presence of Afro-Germans and to demasculinize them in order to prove that Afro-German soldiers could not have carried arms and fought on the Western front alongside white Germans. This specific approach was first introduced by YouTuber Deathmatch in a video titled "Too Many Black Soldiers in Battlefield 1? A Look at History". Supposedly taking a look at the "historical evidence for black soldiers being used in world war one," the approximately 10 minute long video with over half a million views reiterates many of the arguments surrounding non-white soldiers that I have mentioned previously, and predictably concludes that "there are too many" non-white soldiers in the game. In the section on Afro-German soldiers, Deathmatch acknowledges the presence of Afro-German soldiers on the Western front and states that "among the 11 million men" who fought for Germany, they found "only five individual cases of African soldiers serving the German Empire in Europe," three of whom are characterized as musicians by Deathmatch and two others "who might have held a rifle." Deathmatch concludes his argument about Afro-Germans by stating that, "Having one of the German classes be locked as African German is equally ridiculous [as having non-white British soldiers] as there were virtually no blacks fighting for Germany in Europe at any point of the war or even living there for that matter." In Deathmatch's view, "most of the soldiers who died in the First World War were young, white men of European descent," and that the reason for the inclusion of non-white soldiers "can only be explained by a will to appease the black gaming demographic or by some dubious need to show how progressive they are

193 Dice Studios, *The Art of Battlefield 1* (Milwaukie: Dark Horse Books, 2016), 84. Curiously, nothing is mentioned in the book about the Afro-German soldier. There is a brief mention about diversity in relation to the British Army, stating that DICE "wanted to represent some of this [racial diversity] in our multiplayer army and explored the options of including an Indian Sikh and a Nepalese Gurkha" (142). The British scout class was originally meant to be represented by a Gurkha soldier, but this was later changed to a black British soldier.

as a company, pushing ethnic diversity into something where it makes no historical sense."[194]

The reach of the video would soon become evident as identical or similar arguments to those expressed by Deathmatch began to be used. On Battlefield.com, user Flandman drew heavily on Deatchmatch when they wrote that, "There were 5 [Afro-Germans] in the German army on the western front and at least 3 were drummers, hence no fighting.... Of 11 million troops one of these 2 should represent a 4th of the German team. Its embarresing". Other players repeated the same argument, stating for example that "I do know there are African-German (Afrodeutsche in german) during WW1 but they fought mainly in Eastern Africa not Europe. I also know most afro german were musicians like drummer," and "There were only two black soldiers *fighting* in Europe during the war. There were 5 blacks in the entire European German army but of those three were drummers and flag bearers." User Verwoerd01 argued that, "Little is know[n] about how many Blacks actually served in WW1 for Germany, but what is known about them indicates that they were of such a rarity that you'd have a very hard time finding one with a rifle in hand," further adding the familiar argument that "there are 5 known cases of Germans serving in Europe, of which 2 of them were kettle drommers and one one part of one such band." User VincentNZ shows how a reliance on online sources (including Deathmatch's video) was the full extent of most players' research into the topic: "I googled a bit on that topic, and there were indeed black soldiers, but it was not a large number, maybe a dozen and they were not frontline soldiers either, they were musicians, cooks and so forth."[195] On Reddit, user elitejagdtiger argued that "EA has disgraced history and the millions that died by promoting extreme minorities, they make the German sniper black and only 2 were ever recorded, a cook and a drummer, not fucking 1/4 of the German army, stupid EA..."[196] Other play-

194 Deathmatch, "Too Many Black Soldiers in Battlefield 1? A Look at History," *YouTube*, October 21, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8VjfKxlO-QA.

195 Flandman, October 30, 2016, comment on LordJanius67, "Always a Black character," *Battlefield.com*, October 22, 2016, https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/comment/334197/#Comment_334197; BigStudy, "Needs RESPECT and take Responsibility!"; CompetitorRenown, November 23, 2016, comment on MultiMrSeas, "Historical Inaccuracy between races," *Battlefield.com*, November 23, 2016, https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/comment/448997/#Comment_448997; Verwoerd01, "Race in Battlefield 1 and how inaccurate it truly is"; VincentNZ, March 28, 2017, comment on DarthRazzor, "Race of Soldiers in Game," https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/comment/763381/#Comment_763381.

196 Elitejagdtiger, June 15, 2017, comment on JustMyPants, "In the Name of the Tsar Female scout confirmed," *Battlefield_One*, May 22, 2017, https://www.reddit.com/r/battlefield_one/comments/6cofmn/in_the_name_of_the_tsar_female_scout_confirmed.

ers took a broader perspective on the supposed non-combat participation of non-white soldiers, arguing that "the first thing that just grossly stands out on every aspect of this game is 90% of the soldiers are black? like hypothetically maybe some small percentage were cooks and basic manual labor. Or propaganda units that get over hyped. But not the whole war lol," and "So much ahistorical lies[.] Blacks did serve in this war, as support workers and cooks and technicians in the back lines because of segregation."[197]

In insisting that "there were less than a dozen documented Africans in the German Army in Europe, all but one was a musician and the other to my knowledge was not a combat soldier," historical racism is used to justify a desire to see the removal of non-white soldiers from the game while simultaneously expressing a discomfort of seeing non-white men in uniform.[198] In similarity to those who denied non-white men the opportunity to enlist in European armies during the First World War, some players reject the representation of non-white men in uniform on the basis of them being unfit for the role of bearing arms. In the view of contemporary racial pseudo-science in the United States and Great Britain, black men were particularly singled out for their supposed racial inferiority, often finding themselves characterized as naturally lazy, effeminate, weak, lacking in intelligence, and described in other ways as disabled and unfit for everything except for holding a shovel. Black British soldiers, for example, could easily be discharged on account of their race. Despite being allowed to enlist in the British army in accordance with the Manual of Military Law 1907, many were turned away. Even when they were allowed to enlist, they faced continuous review of their supposed inferiority. One such black British soldier had their race entered in their medical history report as a "slight defect".[199] Furthermore, in accordance with the racial "martial races" theory, some races were seen as more feminine than others. While certain African men from French West Africa were considered particularly suitable as soldiers by the French on the basis of their supposed "natural instincts" and low intelligence (thus more courageous), Indochinese men were considered intelligent but ultimately more feminine and less physically fitted to be soldiers than their West African counterparts (despite

197 TrippyXeno, "WW1 and black soldiers?!?," *Battlefield.com*, May 31, 2017, https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/109578/ww1-and-black-soldiers; SyfruitCamelia, June 11, 2016, comment on JordanLikeMJ, "Soldier ethnicity," *Battlefield.com*, June 10, 2016, https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/comment/19268#Comment_19268.

198 Snazzy_Snafu_OG, January 1, 2017, comment on MadMaxandMACO, "Hardcore community ignored. Hardcore community gone....," *Battlefield.com*, December 30, 2016, https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/comment/576795/#Comment_576795.

199 Costello, *Black Tommies*, 34–38; Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy*, 63–103.

this, several battalions of Indochinese soldiers saw combat during the war, but more worked behind the lines).[200] The intersection of race and gender is particularly evident in these arguments. War and soldiering was and is considered a particularly masculine space. To disempower non-white men during the First World War, in particularly black men who were considered "colored interlopers" in the words of Jennifer C. James, white men would often block them from martial masculinity and demasculinize them by forcing the majority of black men to become laborers and to take up positions that were assumed more suitable for their race (and the white racial hierarchy) which did not involve non-white men fighting against other white men.[201]

Players repeat historical racism through their own marginalization of soldiers of color, demasculinizing and racializing them with "un-soldierly" attributes in order to reject them from the game. Musicians, they argue, are not soldiers (even if they wear uniforms) and therefore do not engage in frontline combat. Yet a closer look at the Afro-German soldiers they describe as musicians who never saw combat on the Western front often reveal the opposite. A reoccurring image used to prove Afro-German existence as well as disprove their status as combatants is a postcard of mounted cavalrymen, featuring a man of African ancestry in the role of a tympanist as the focal point of the photograph. The man's name is Wilhelm Eli Sambo. Information about Sambo's personal life is scarce, but it is said that he was taken to Germany in 1891 as a young boy from Kamerun and that he possibly grew up in a military orphanage in Potsdam. In 1905, he enlisted in the 4th company of the Eisenbahn-Regiment Nr. 1 before being transferred two years later to the Leib-Garde-Husaren-Regiment where he was trained as a kettledrummer. During the First World War, he served on the Western front with the Leib-Garde-Husaren-Regiment from August 1914 to May 1915. Sambo subsequently fought on the Eastern front where he was seriously wounded in action. After recuperating from his wounds, Sambo was sent to join German forces fighting alongside the Ottoman Empire. He was ultimately taken as a prisoner of war and did not return home to Germany until March 1919.[202] Josef Mambo was the name of another uniformed musician that is brought up to argue against the existence of Afro-Germans on the frontline. Mambo, in similarity with Sambo, was taken to Germany as a boy in 1897 and never returned to his birthplace. Between 1904 and 1913, Mambo served as a ket-

200 Fogarty, *Race and War in France*, 15 – 54.

201 James, *Freedom Bought With Blood*, 19.

202 Marianne Bechhaus-Gerst, "Wilhelm Elo Sambo – Patentkind des Kaisers und Blauer Funke," in *Köln und der Deutsche Kolonialismus: Eine Spurensuche*, ed. Marianne Bechhaus-Gerst and Anne-Kathrin Horstmann (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2013), 175 – 177.

tledrummer in the Grenadier-Regiments zu pferde. Between 1915 and 1918, he served as a sergeant with the Grenadierregiment Frhr. v. Derfflinger Nr. 3 and served both on the Western and Eastern front, being wounded twice in East Prussia and at Verdun. For his actions during the war, Mambo was awarded not only the Wound Badge, but also the Iron Cross 2nd Class.[203] More representative of the scarce information that is available about Afro-German participants who were not as well known before the war as Sambo and Mambo were because of their roles as exoticized kettledrummers is Heipold Jensen. Jensen served as a senior non-commissioned officer in the Prussian Army from 1914 through 1918 and later participated in the suppression of the 1919 Spartacist uprising in Berlin as part of the Freikorps.[204]

The need to defend the white mythic space, even if informed of the factual mistakes they have committed, trumps any effort by its supporters to correct themselves. The active marginalization of non-white elements in a white mythic space does not allow room for the possibility of a prominent space for those who are seen as intruders. Only a continuity of whiteness has legitimacy. When presented with evidence that could potentially break the white mythic space, players continue their rejection. For example, in response to the images that those who argue against the white mythic space have put up in threads on Battlefield.com, user JohnnySmirnov declared that they had some "interesting info I found on one of the "Black German Soldiers in WW1" people like to bring up." The man the user is referring to is Afro-German Gustav Sabac el Cher. The user is quick to point out that Sabac el Cher left the army in 1909 (and could therefore not have fought in the First World War), but more importantly, the user argues, "he wasnt actually a soldier at all, he was a Music Master of 1st Prussian Grenadiers".[205] Despite the presence of Gustav Sabac el Cher proving the existence of uniformed Afro-Germans in the early twentieth century, in addition to visual proof of the long history of the Afro-German community, he did not count because he was not "actually a soldier." The self-referential nature of the white mythic space is evident in the recycled arguments used by its defenders and how these in turn reinforce erroneous notions about the presence of non-white soldiers in

203 Susann Lewerenz, *Die Deutsche Afrika-Schau (1935–1940): Rassismus, Kolonialrevisionismus und postkoloniale Auseinadersetzungen im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2005), 120, 128.

204 Lewerenz, *Die Deutsche Afrika-Schau*, 128.

205 JohnnySmirnov, "Some interesting info I found on one of the "Black German Soldiers in WW1" people like to bring up," *Battlefield.com*, July 7, 2016, https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/7871/some-interesting-info-i-found-on-one-of-the-black-german-soldiers-in-ww1-people-like-to-bring-up.

the First World War. In supporting the contradictory idea that there were only five Afro-German men in uniform (most of them being musicians) while simultaneously arguing that there might not have been Afro-Germans at all, it is not a big leap from there to embrace the idea that there were only two Afro-German soldiers (or less) to finally accepting that there were none whatsoever.

The focus on soldiers in the historical memory surrounding military conflicts is a widespread phenomenon that centers the experience of war on the perspective of frontline soldiers while omitting the participation (and importance) of other participants. This omission becomes racist when frontline combat is seen as the exclusive realm of white masculinity and the supposedly inferior and less important roles considered a space reserved for non-white men – if they are given any space at all in popular imagination, in full accordance with the white mythic space of the First World War. The correlation of non-white men with supply, labor, and other non-combat duties by players sees them as non-participants, excluding them not only from the privilege of holding a rifle in the game and the imaginary danger that comes with it, but also the real danger in the historical war. In reality, the frontline was never only populated by combat soldiers, but by a vast array of uniformed and non-uniformed participants who also experienced the risk of being injured or dying as a result of the combat ranging along the frontlines. Take the case of Gershom Browne as an example. British West Indies Regiment soldier Gershom Browne from British Guiana was not officially sanctioned to fight against German soldiers on the Western front and was relegated to non-combat duties as a result of British prejudice. This did not mean that he never saw the trenches or that he never experienced the loss of his fellow comrades. In his own words as an elderly veteran, Browne recalled the danger that he and his friends experienced:

> I was in the trench when they started to shell. Shells coming, man. What happened with my friend, Eustace Phillips. So, he was on the hilltop and he was just going into the Bivouac when he and the shell met together. Dead! And those things always make you feel you shouldn't have been in the army. I didn't get to see his funeral because when you're in the front line you don't have no funerals. They just make a hole and sometimes four or five of you go in the hole, you know.[206]

Battlefield 1, in similarity with other historical first-person shooters, has to work within the limits of authenticity lite which sees an erasure of non-combat elements in order to make the game playable and enjoyable for those who play it. Yet by doing so, *Battlefield 1* helps to spread what James Campbell has termed

206 Bourne, *Black Poppies*, 73.

combat gnosticism. Using the canonization of specific First World War soldier-poets as his example, Campbell defines the term as a construction where "the experience of fighting provides a connection to Reality, an unmediated Truth to which only those who have undergone the liminal trauma of combat have access."[207] The resulting ideology privileges the perspective of "men [...] who have actively engaged in combat" and considers it as the only authentic connection to the reality of war. Campbell points out that "mere military status does not signify initiation" into this authentic connection. It is not enough that the male subject is uniformed, he must have acquired the privileged status of being a "warrior."[208] Combat gnosticism privileges the voices and perspective of martial masculine experiences while disregarding the perspectives of non-combatants in addition to other men and women in uniform. The gender exclusion of authenticity that Campbell rightfully emphasizes is important. What Campbell has overlooked is race. As the white mythic space makes clear, confirmed time and time again by comments from various *Battlefield 1* players across the internet, race is also an important factor to take in consideration. It is white, male combat soldiers that signal authenticity and provide the connection to reality that both combat gnosticism and the white mythic space rely upon. It is white, male combat soldiers who are canonized in First World War poetry and whose continuity of whiteness reassures players of a historical video game that the characters they play as are authentic representations of historical actors. Although *Battlefield 1* is unable to detach itself from centering on frontline combatants and combat gnosticism as a result of the game's genre, the inclusion of non-white combat soldiers in the game's multiplayer features assured that combat gnosticism was not only centered on white men.

This was a problem that needed to be fixed. In combination with claims of historical inaccuracy, some players likened the inclusion of non-white soldiers to a software bug, an error in the game's programming. User TheophilKung reported the issue to EA Answers HQ, a community forum meant for solving technical issues, by stating that "the german's recon is a black guy, i think you have to fix it".[209] On Reddit, user Hektiicz reported that the "bug with the black German scout and cavalryman needs a fix asap," while another player expressed that "there should not be a coloured soldier in that particular uniform [...] i really

207 James Campbell, "Combat Gnosticism: The Ideology of First World War Poetry Criticism," *New Literary History* 30, no. 1 (1999): 204.

208 Campbell, "Combat Gnosticism," 204 – 207.

209 TheophilKung, "the german's recon is a black guy, i think you have to fix it," *EA Answers HQ*, October 19, 2016, https://answers.ea.com/t5/Technical-Issues/the-german-s-recon-is-a-black-guy-i-think-you-have-to-fix-it/td-p/5635853.

hope this is a bug and they will change it." Another typical example was the report that described the "Black african american in main menu" as a bug, adding that "I don't know if this is just the beta glitch but I'm reporting this anyway since there seems to be a wrong character in the menu. Maybe a leftover asset from BF Hardline?"[210] The player's reference to *Battlefield Hardline* (2015), a police game not set in the past but in present-day Miami and Los Angeles, makes it clear that the player is attempting (likely in mockery) to make the case that the in-game character model of an African American man can only have come from a game set during the "War on Drugs", with all the contemporary racist allusions that come with it. On Battlefield.com, among similar complaints of error in the programming, one user for example set the presence of Afro-German soldiers ("black soldiers in the German army...wtf? No really, wtf?!?!") as the primary issue of the game alongside other technical problems such as bugs and glitches.[211] Some players did not wait on DICE to fix the supposedly technical problem of non-white men in uniform. They took it upon themselves to fix it by altering the game through modifications ("mods"). One such mod, uploaded by creator Madicode to the website Nexus Mods for distribution, enticed potential players with promises that they would be able to experience *Battlefield 1* "like you never did before. Get ready for many immersive moments featuring historically accurate and realistic soldiers," further declaring that the "Realistic Soldiers MOD changes in-game models, within the engine limits, in a realistic and historically accurate way."[212] What Madicode meant by "historically accurate and realistic soldiers" was specifically *white* soldiers, continuing the pattern of assigning authenticity to white bodies and a sense of historical immersion to the absence of black bodies. As it advertised through screenshots and a trailer, the mod changed the race of all non-white soldier models and replaced them with white soldier models. The most prominent screenshot used to attract players did not hide away from this as it presented the opportunity to replace the black soldier model of the German scout with a white soldier model. That

210 Hektiicz, "Dice pls fix," *Battlefield_One*, December 17, 2016, https://www.reddit.com/r/battlefield_one/comments/5its4q/dice_pls_fix; ICantMeltSteeLBeamz, November 28, 2016, comment on "Why is the German scout dark skinned?", https://www.reddit.com/r/battlefield_one/comments/5fabw6/why_is_the_german_scout_dark_skinned/daisjzm/; gnt_1, "[BUG] Black african american in main menu," *Battlefield_One*, September 1, 2016, https://www.reddit.com/r/battlefield_one/comments/50mx70/bug_black_african_american_in_main_menu.

211 Tiki-406, "Black soldiers in the German Army?," *Battlefield.com*, October 26, 2016, https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/46440/black-soldiers-in-the-german-army.

212 "Battlefield 1 Realistic Soldiers Mod," *Nexus Mods*, https://www.nexusmods.com/battlefield1/mods/2?tab=description&BH=1. See also Madicode, "Battlefield 1 Realistic Soldiers MOD Trailer," *YouTube*, September 20, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3UuIbIUakDU.

there was an audience and demand for an alteration of this kind, despite the avowal of EA and DICE of all modifications of their games, is evident in the frustrated question by Reddit user Rex_Romulus: "Are there any mods that make German/Austrian soldiers white instead of this silly shit I see?"[213]

Not all players resorted to using erroneous historical facts to prove their point about the alleged historical inaccuracy of including non-white soldiers in the game. Some players chose to resort to explicitly racist mockery in order to make their disappointment and anger with the game known. Expressions such as "WE WUZZ KAISER N SHIET", "we wuz germans!", and "Ayo hol up hol up – you be sayin we wuz germans n sheeit?" were reoccurring ways of mocking what was considered a ridiculous claim of a black presence in European history, in this case the existence of Afro-Germans.[214] The above expressions are variations of "We Wuz Kangz", a racist expression and an internet meme with origins in 2015 that was popularized by the image board 4Chan. It is categorized as a hate symbol by the anti-hate organization the Anti-Defamation League and is described as a phrase that is a "racist shorthand reference to discredited but popular Afrocentric theories that claimed sub-Saharan Africans were descended from ancient Egyptians," further adding that the phrase is meant to mock both Afrocentric theories and those who believe in them. The phrase uses a "mock black American dialect that is intended to portray blacks as ignorant and a contrast to the ostensibly more civilized ancient Egyptians [...] The overall intent [of the phrase] is to portray blacks as crude, ignorant and uncivilized."[215] Within two days after the release of the *Battlefield 1* reveal trailer, there were more than a dozen references to the racist phrase, the first one being made two hours after the trailer was released on YouTube.[216] Some commenters combined this phrase with additional racist stereotypes focused on what was perceived as African American (and in extension, black) mannerisms, as one Reddit

213 Rex_Romulus, "Can I get a mod to alter appearances yet?," *Battlefield_One*, October 31, 2016, https://www.reddit.com/r/battlefield_one/comments/5ae5tc/can_i_get_a_mod_to_alter_appearances_yet.

214 GEFREITER95, October 17, 2016, comment on "Player customization – is it a thing?," https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/comment/260652#Comment_260652; panalfik, October 31, 2016, comment on "Change this colored german soldiers pls!," https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/comment/341748#Comment_341748; [deleted], "Ayo hol up hol up – you be sayin we wuz germans n sheeit?," *Battlefield_One*, July 1, 2017, https://www.reddit.com/r/battlefield_one/comments/4qp0cc/ayo_hol_up_hol_up_you_be_sayin_we_wuz_germans_n.

215 "We Wuz Kangz," *Anti-Defamation League*, https://www.adl.org/education/references/hate-symbols/we-wuz-kangs.

216 "We wuz kaisers n shieeet." GPU, May 6, 2016, comment on "Battlefield 1 Official Reveal Trailer," &lc=UgizjUFAqmcbRHgCoAEC.

user gives an example of: "AYO MANG *gesticulates hand signs* AYO HOL UP *spins in place* SO WHAT YOU BE SAYIN' IS *smacks lips* WE WUZ IMPERIAL GERMANZ 'N' SHIEEEEEEET".[217] Although a few comments are used to mock the claim of there being a black presence in general during the First World War ("WE WUZ SOLDIERS N SHIET"[218]), the majority of the racist comments predictably target the inclusion of the Afro-German scout. In full accordance with the white mythic space, the presence of a German of African ancestry is considered an impossibility in the past, invoking race as geographically fixed in addition to a racialized notion of national identity. With allusions to the German Empire, in particular that of the German Kaiser, racist comments ridicule the notion of being black and German, the former being seen as primitive and savage, while the latter is considered as the complete opposite: civilized, disciplined, and most importantly, *white*. One has a place in the past while the other is an intruder. The perceived illegitimate claim of a historical presence concurs with the accusations of "blackwashing" history while simultaneously reinforcing a continuity of whiteness. The versatility of the phrase meant that it was used both as a stand-alone statement which defended the white mythic space of the First World War or as a way to ridicule those who tried to argue against the popular idea that non-white inclusion was historically accurate. In one specific case, three individual users teamed up to write out "WE WUZ GERMANZ" in response to a commenter trying to explain the global aspects of the First World War.[219] The erasure of blackness through racist mockery reveals what is at stake for many of the *Battlefield 1* players who reiterate the same arguments against non-white inclusion: the loss of white hegemonic power over the popular representation of the First World War.

The use of memes to communicate racist ideas and the white mythic space of the First World War took other forms than hastily written phrases that could be repeated over and over again. The visual memes about non-white soldiers in *Battlefield 1* provided for more opportunities to display the black body as foreign, strange, and out of place in comparison with the authentic white bodies. One such meme, ostensibly about player behavior after selecting the scout class in the game, explicitly uses racist imagery. In the image, a cartoon version of the

217 [deleted], September 24, 2017, comment on 1234thomas5, "Holding the 1911 like a gangster(graphic bug)," *Battlefield_One*, September 24, 2017, https://www.reddit.com/r/battlefield_one/comments/725yzu/holding_the_1911_like_a_gangstergraphic_bug/dngfvj7.

218 [deleted], "WE WUZ SOLDIERS N SHIET," *Battlefield_One*, September 2, 2016, https://www.reddit.com/r/battlefield_one/comments/50slgt/we_wuz_soldiers_n_shiet.

219 Mr1999, October 2, 2016, comment on "Battlefield 1 "black washing" the European hero's," https://www.reddit.com/r/gaming/comments/4i9ecx/battlefield_1_black_washing_the_european_heros/d8a6hq8.

German scout, depicted holding a rifle, is shown walking towards an unseen hill, with only a sign in the background informing us that he is walking there, the sign featuring an arrow pointing to the left with the words "Hill 500 m". The scout says, "i can't wait to be a useless piece of shit all round," a reference to the tendency of some players to not contribute to the team effort through "camping", the act of remaining statically in place in an advantageous position and getting individual long-range kills. What separates this meme from other memes making fun of the common gaming phenomenon of camping snipers is the racialized scout. The face of the scout is a grotesque racist caricature with big lips, buckteeth, and a wide nose in exaggerated proportions, an image likely copied from an American white nationalist cartoon. The phrase "We Wuz Huns Und Shit" is etched into the helmet that the scout is wearing, referencing the nickname given to German soldiers by Anglo-American soldiers.[220]

Figure 2.8: *Battlefield 1* "he protec but he also attac" meme.

220 The original source of the meme is unknown, but a copy of the meme was uploaded to the meme database Know Your Meme on December 29, 2016. See "sniper of the german empire in BF1," *Know Your Meme*, December 29, 2016, https://knowyourmeme.com/photos/1205191-battlefield.

Another meme (Figure 2.8) is a variation of the "he protec but he also attac" meme. The *Battlefield 1* meme features three panels, each with an individual image from the game showing the German scout, with the accompanying text stating "he protec / he also attac / but most importantly he blac".[221] Meant to be humorous in nature due to its rhyming and accompanying imagery, and more tame than the previous example, this meme continues to focus the viewers' attention on the blackness of the German scout. An additional example of this phenomena comes from YouTube user Rhizone who uploaded a 30-second long video showing them playing the game and bayoneting a German scout from the opposite team. The video turns to slow-motion in the act, allowing the viewers of the video a longer look at the face of the German scout as he tumbles to the ground. At this point, the hip-hop song "The Ghetto" by Too Short starts playing as the video begins to zoom in on the face of the scout. An accompanying sarcastic text, "just ordinary WW1 German sniper…", appears and fills the top of the screen.[222] The need to portray the Afro-German scout as out of place and strange through racialization is a display of the continued obsession that some players have with the black presence in the game. This obsession is encapsulated in the image of an man of African ancestry wearing a German uniform. The foreign blackness always has to be pointed out and contrasted against the default state of whiteness which has been "blackwashed". Only white soldiers can be considered ordinary, average, or historically accurate, and should therefore be granted a privileged place of deference. Despite their crude nature, drawing heavily on racist American markers of blackness, memes like the ones mentioned have the ability to reinforce these ideas and to communicate them in an efficient and accessible way. The discourse that is produced in reaction to these memes in turn helps to spread established arguments against inclusion, as YouTube commenter Tierchenmeister expressed in the comment section of Rhizone's video: "thank you DICE from Sweden for shitting on our fallen ancestor's graves by replacing them. Not. Buying."[223] The fear of "blackwashing", of rewriting history, and of white soldiers being replaced by non-white soldiers is reflected by one of the earliest *Battlefield 1* memes. Named by one uploader as "Battlefield 1 versus Reality", the meme is divided into two rows of four images. The heading of the first row is "Reality" and displays several historical photographs of Ger-

221 Luveth, "ze german scout," *Battlefield_One*, August 3, 2017, https://www.reddit.com/r/battlefield_one/comments/6rby3g/ze_german_scout.

222 Rhizone, "Battlefield 1 – ordinary WW1 German sniper," *YouTube*, June 15, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0CjXGMRPymQ.

223 Tierchenmeister, October 30, 2016, comment on "ordinary WW1 German sniper," &lc=Ugj00tuQQOpzsHgCoAEC.

man, Australian, French, and British soldiers. The second row is titled "Battlefield 1" and shows in-game images of soldiers of color from the German and British factions, including the black British scout who is referenced as Australian because of the slouch hat he is shown as wearing. The hat was present during the open beta of the game, but was later removed upon release. The French image consists only of a question mark, in anticipation of further updates to the game.[224] The message is plainly conveyed by the juxtaposition of historical white soldiers and fictional black soldiers. Through the use of historical photographs to grant legitimacy to a selective white reality, the viewer of the images is meant to be reminded of the white mythic space of the First World War and contrast it against the fictional black presence in *Battlefield 1*. The backlash against racial inclusion that the meme's anonymous creator intended to be the natural response to the comparison between white reality and black fiction ensures a continuity of whiteness and the idea of the First World War as an exclusively "white man's war".

"Thread number 75896 about black soldiers in BF1," wrote one Battlefield.com user jokingly, expressing a sentiment that reveals how the racist backlash against soldiers of color in the game had reached endemic proportions by the spring of 2017.[225] Comments and complaints could be found anywhere it was possible to encounter conversations about *Battlefield 1*. "Every time I watch a Westie video, or jackfrags, there's always a fucking sea of comments hating on [...] the fact DICE had the AUDACITY to throw PoC into the game. *It affects literally nothing and doesn't matter*," wrote one frustrated Reddit user about their experience watching popular *Battlefield* players on YouTube, urging other players that "For the love of God, stop complaining about black soldiers".[226] Some players, confused by the backlash, found the racist arguments being repeated by people close to them. One player, for example, asked if there was a reason why some

224 The British scout was originally intended to be represented by a Ghurkha wearing a slouch hat. The origins of the meme is dated around the release of the open beta of the game. A thread on 4Chan included the meme as early as August 31, 2016, while an /r/gaming submission of the meme on September 4, 2016 likely helped popularize it even further. See Anonymous, "What's up with that?," *4Chan*, August 31, 2016, https://4archive.org/board/b/thread/701961027/whats-up-with-that, and Rondanini, "Battlefield 1 versus Reality," *Gaming*, September 4, 2016, https://www.reddit.com/r/gaming/comments/515q38/battlefield_1_versus_reality.

225 HANSGRUBER30, "Thread number 75896 about black soldiers in BF1," *Battlefield.com*, April 4, 2017, https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/99692/thread-number-75896-about-black-soldiers-in-bf1.

226 JITTERduDe, "[BF1] For the love of God, stop complaining about black soldiers," *Battlefield*, February 22, 2017, https://www.reddit.com/r/Battlefield/comments/5vftdx/bf1_for_the_love_of_god_stop_complaining_about.

people were complaining about the diversity in the game, explaining that "I have seen some of my friends around me saying battlefield 1 is too diverse and there were not a lot of blacks in the war for example the german army."[227] Although the focus of this investigation has been on online discourse, a comment like this reveals that the racist discourse surrounding *Battlefield 1* could easily take the step from the digital realm to real life, finding new and efficient ways of reproducing and reinforcing the white mythic space in the process. Together with the rise of complaints from other players about the constant barrage of racist threads and comments came frustrated responses from moderators whose role it was to oversee the discussions. On Battlefield.com, a moderator explained that discussions surrounding the inclusion of non-white soldiers in the game "all get inevitably closed down because they never add anything, Just the same argument over and over again."[228] The self-referential arguments and the very nature of the white mythic space discourse lead to hundreds of almost identical discussions. Many of these threads were locked down by frustrated moderators who had to explain that the discussions about soldiers of color "never end well" and give out warnings to commenters not to recreate similar threads, with threats of punishment if their words were not listened to. Even though moderators called arguments against inclusion "nonsense," very few comments were removed or censored unless they contained explicitly racist content such as racial slurs.[229] The onslaught of questions could even lead to permanent changes in the rules of the community. On February 23, 2017, the Battlefield subreddit announced a new rule targeting posts that complained "about historical accuracy (especially black soldiers etc)," explaining that they were no longer allowed. In

227 Sab13000, "Is there a reason why some people are complaining about diversity?," *Battlefield_One,* December 5, 2016, https://www.reddit.com/r/battlefield_one/comments/5gj4ry/is_there_a_reason_why_some_people_are_complaining. For another example, see lucidstorm, "Black soldier in german troops," *Battlefield.com*, November 1, 2016, https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/51570/black-soldier-in-german-troops.

228 LOLGotYerTags, April 4, 2017, comment on "Thread number 75896", https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/comment/778127/" \l "Comment_778127.

229 xxxCoOlBr33zExxx, April 5, 2017, comment on kingslayer8790, "What's with the black German sniper," *Battlefield.com*, April 5, 2017, https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/comment/778250/#Comment_778250; StarscreamUK, March 4, 2017, comment on terza712, "Black Germans?Seriously DICE," *Battlefield.com,* March 4, 2017, https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/comment/712321/#Comment_712321; Cryphisss, November 1, 2016, comment on "Black soldier in german troops," https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/comment/348762/#Comment_348762; StarscreamUK, May 6, 2017, comment on dwing86, "*racist*," *Battlefield.com*, May 6, 2017, https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/105762/racist.

similarity with the Battlefield.com moderators, the moderators found the discussions detrimental to the community: "We've had this discussion before. We're not having it again. Dont complain, or complain somewhere else. Black people are in the game, deal with it."[230]

The racist backlash against inclusion had a tangible effect on players and the discourse surrounding the game, but the largest impact fell on the non-white players in the gaming communities built up around *Battlefield 1*. For black players of the game, the racist intentions behind the complaints about soldiers of color were evident, which made one player feel rejected "because gaming is becoming another thing that I, and most other black gamers, feel like we're being pushed out." Another player emphasized the importance of representation, explaining that the inclusion of non-white soldiers in the game "means a lot to us and it makes you feel like you matter, like you're part of this rather than an outsider who doesn't belong," but concluded that, "It's really disappointing and sad to read posts like this. It makes me realize that despite the efforts of inclusive developers like DICE, many of my fellow gamers won't really ever fully accept me. I'm not the right color for them." Striking at the heart of the racist backlash against non-white soldiers, a descendant of African American soldiers poignantly asked: "I have ancestors that fought and died in that war. Are they not worthy of depicting?"[231]

230 Sloth_on_meth, "Rule changes," *Battlefield*, February 23, 2017, https://www.reddit.com/r/Battlefield/comments/5vq823/rule_changes; sloth_on_meth, February 22, 2017, comment on "[BF1] For the love of God," https://www.reddit.com/r/Battlefield/comments/5vftdx/bf1_for_the_love_of_god_stop_complaining_about/de29v2h.

231 hero108fu, "BF1 Saga," *Gaming*, October 22, 2016, https://www.reddit.com/r/gaming/comments/58tcn3/bf1_saga; LONESOME_GAVLAN, March 15, 2017, comment on Robert-101, "Has this game gone beyond the PALE of political correctness ???," *Battlefield_One*, March 15, 2017, https://www.reddit.com/r/battlefield_one/comments/5ziyif/has_this_game_gone_beyond_the_pale_of_political/deyj45z; TheNerdyNegro, October 21, 2016, comment on "Battlefield 1"black washing" the European hero's," https://www.reddit.com/r/gaming/comments/4i9ecx/battlefield_1_black_washing_the_european_heros/d90xue7.

Aftermath, Conclusion, and Future

There was more yet to come for *Battlefield 1*. The game received additional content expansions in the form of downloadable content (DLC) that added not only new weapons, vehicles, multiplayer maps and modes, but also new factions and soldier models that increased the diversity of the game. The first expansion, *They Shall Not Pass* (March 14, 2017), added the French Empire as a new faction. The French assault class is represented by a *Tirailleur Sénégalais* (Figure 3.1), reflecting the way that West African soldiers were employed by the French army. *Turning Tides* (divided into two parts, released December 11, 2017 and January 30, 2018) added the British Royal Marines as its own separate faction but with no soldiers of color included. However, the expansion came with new maps set during the Gallipoli campaign. When playing as the British faction on these maps, the scout and medic class has been changed to soldiers from the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps. More specifically, the scout class is represented by a Māori soldier wearing the characteristic New Zealand slouch hat with the "lemon squeezer" bash (Figure 3.2). The final expansion was titled *Apocalypse* (February 20, 2018) and did not add a new faction.[232]

Yet it was the second expansion, *In the Name of the Tsar* (September 5, 2017), that would cause a new controversy amongst players that would intermix with the continuing backlash against non-white soldiers in the game. The expansion added Imperial Russia as a playable faction in addition to expanding the game to include the Eastern front of the First World War. Furthermore, the expansion pushed the game beyond the First World War with the inclusion of the Russian Civil War, making both the Red and White Army playable factions on maps set during the war.[233] The center of the new controversy again focused on diversity. Holding true to the game's goal of depicting unknown aspects of the war, the Russian faction's scout class was represented by a woman. In similarity with the base game, the promotional material for the expansion centered on the Russian scout, depicting her in full uniform, her head shaven, and with a rifle or a pistol at the ready. In the official teaser trailer for the expansion, it is a woman who narrates it, and once the expansion was released, the main menu image was

232 "They Shall Not Pass," Electronic Arts, https://www.ea.com/games/battlefield/battlefield-1/they-shall-not-pass; "Turning Tides," Electronic Arts, https://www.ea.com/games/battlefield/battlefield-1/turning-tides; "Apocalypse," Electronic Arts, https://www.ea.com/games/battlefield/battlefield-1/apocalypse.

233 "In the Name of the Tsar," Electronic Arts, https://www.ea.com/games/battlefield/battlefield-1/in-the-name-of-the-tsar.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110729306-006

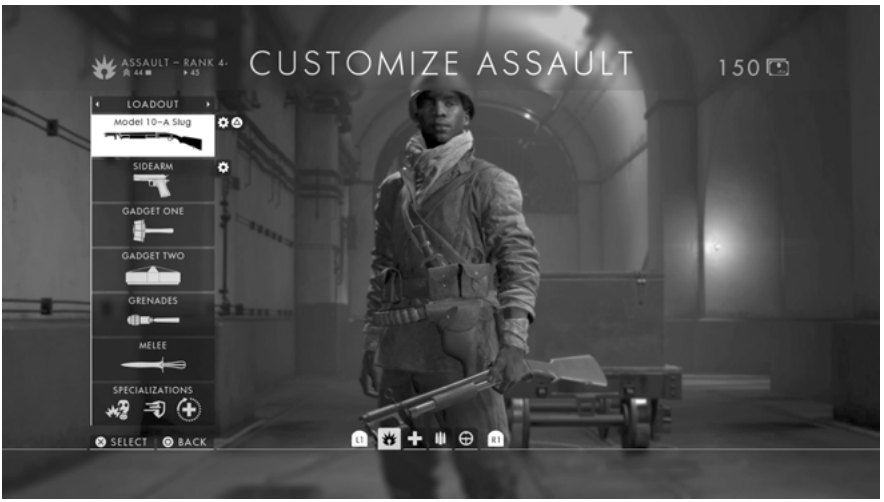

Figure 3.1: French *Tirailleur Sénégalais* assault on the "Fort de Vaux" map.

Figure 3.2: New Zealand Māori scout on the "Cape Helles" map.

exchanged from that of the African-American soldier to the Russian woman soldier.[234]

234 Battlefield, "Battlefield 1 In the Name of the Tsar Official Teaser Trailer," *YouTube*, June 10, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O3zza3ofZ0Q.

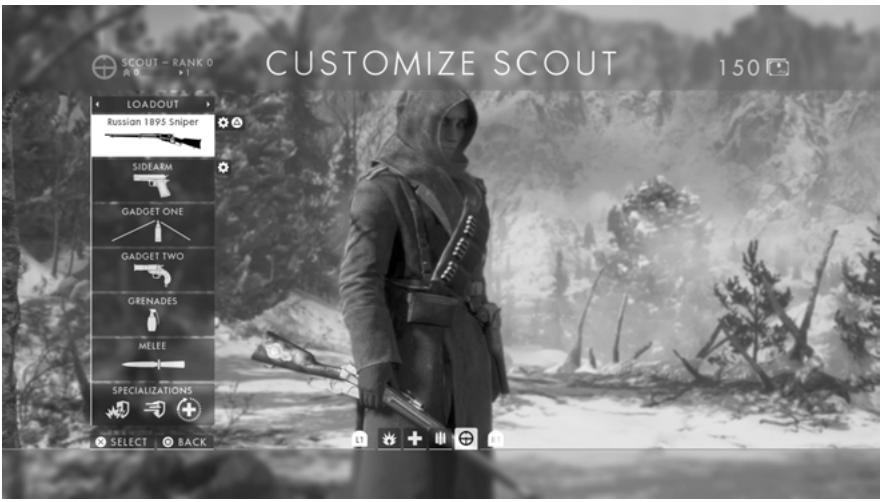

Figure 3.3: Russian woman scout on the "Łupków Pass" map.

This was a new milestone in the history of the *Battlefield* franchise as, for the first time, players could play as a woman in the multiplayer mode. The inclusion of women in *Battlefield 1* had been present from the very start in the shape of Zara Ghufran, the Bedouin protagonist of the single player war story *Nothing Is Written*. There was also a codex entry titled "Women Rise" that explained the participation of women during the First World War. While the presence of Zara did cause some backlash, it was mostly overshadowed by the racist backlash against non-white soldiers on the cover of the game and in the multiplayer mode. In explaining the rationale behind the inclusion of Zara, DICE creative director Lars Gustavsson stated in an interview that,

> As a whole, we tried to provide the best possible diversity in the game, portraying the era both with the empires and kingdoms and within these different forces, different troops that fought alongside each other and get – with broad strokes – a good capture of what these forces were built upon. And, as such, we quickly saw that the female Bedouin was a good fit for the single player campaign.[235]

235 Tim Mulkerin, "'Battlefield 1': DICE refuses to say whether female avatars are coming to multiplayer," *Mic*, October 21, 2016, https://www.mic.com/articles/157355/battlefield-1-dice-refuses-to-say-whether-female-avatars-are-coming-to-multiplayer.

However, these same reasons were used to exclude women from being present in the multiplayer mode at launch.[236] It was only with the Imperial Russian army that a viable and historically accurate opportunity was apparently found by DICE to include women.[237] The basis for the Russian woman scout (Figure 3.2) in the game are the women soldiers of the 1st Russian Women's Battalion of Death, an all-women combat unit formed in 1917 that saw combat against German forces on the Eastern front. Several women battalions were established, but women like Maria Bochkareva, future commander of the 1st Russian Women's Battalion of Death, also served in regular units alongside men. Women continued to fight in various combat units on both sides of the Russian Civil War.[238]

The mixed response by players to the inclusion of women soldiers in the multiplayer mode was predicated on a discourse similar (if not identical) to that of the rejection of non-white soldiers. DICE and Electronic Arts were once again accused of having a nefarious left-wing political agenda that they were supposedly forcing onto their players. "The Russian female scout and black German sniper are not problems themselves, but merely symptoms of a larger problem," wrote a Battlefield.com user, frantically arguing that "the more and more history is changed to suit what is politically correct, the closer and closer we get to a totalitarian society."[239] Another player inexplicably complained about "the fact they are using that female scout as an advertisement," contending that DICE and Electronic Arts were centering the Russian woman scout as a way to show how progressive they were. Unconvincingly, the player stated that they "dont care that the woman is in the game, yeah id prefer it to be all male because those females were the minority of fihters, but i care that they are using it as a way to advertise an event and their games DLC."[240]

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236 See Matt Purslow, "Battlefield 1 scrapped female soldiers because boys don't believe in them, says ex-DICE coder," *PCGames*, July 10, 2016, https://www.pcgamesn.com/battlefield-1/battlefield-1-scrapped-female-soldiers-because-boys-don-t-believe-in-them-says-ex-dice-coder.

237 Paresh Dave, "Historical accuracy, not a diversity push, brought 'Battlefield' playable female characters," *Los Angeles Times*, June 20, 2017, https://www.latimes.com/business/technology/la-fi-tn-battlefield-20170619-htmlstory.html.

238 On the combat participation of Russian women in the First World War and the Russian Civil War, see Laurie S. Stoff, *They Fought for the Motherland: Russia's Women Soldiers in World War I and the Revolution* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2006).

239 BobsAndVegane, September 19, 2017, comment on fenfaso, "Embrace your feminine side," *Battlefield.com*, September 19, 2017, https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/comment/1004493/#Comment_1004493.

240 brenda1001, "Female scout class," *Battlefield.com*, May 26, 2017, https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/108635/female-scout-class.

Other arguments against inclusion were also familiar, the majority of discussions anchored in complaints about historical accuracy and realism. Arguments centered around the appropriate place for women in relation to the masculine (and white) historical battlefield were common. Players assigned them non-combat roles that were considered historically appropriate for women, such as nurses or factory workers. Women filling a combat role could simply not be reconciled with the historical setting. "Could've save them [women] for the next battlefield," wrote Battlefield.com user velliejohn, complaining that out "of all battlefield games.. you put female multiplayer characters in battlefield 1 (that is suppose to be base on world war 1) Where there only men who fought and died the most?"[241] Even in cases where the player was aware of the historical context of the inclusion of the Russian woman scout, they still saw no ground for inclusion. "Russian Battalion of Death coming to multiplayer is stupid," wrote one commenter, contradictorily stating that "adding female soldiers to the "In The Name Of The Tsar" would be very unrealistic. Yes the Russian Battalion of Death did exist. Yes they saw combat. Yes, they were disbanded because they were used for propaganda and it wasn't working as well as they had hoped."[242] Unable to argue against the non-existence of women combat soldiers, some players resorted yet again to numbers and statistics. Comments such as "please tell me you realize only around 300 actually saw combat and they fought in few battles and were disbanded soon afterwards," and "2,000 [women] out of 12 million. Where's the red headed Irishman for the Ottomans? I'm sure they had at least a few in their army" attempted to ridicule and minimize the presence of women as combat soldiers in the First World War.[243] The repeated argument that inclusion disrespected the sacrifices made by veterans of the First World War was framed as a specifically masculine sacrifice, as one player argued that "real people fought and died in this war and watering down their sacrifice in the name of "gender equality" (especially given how many men were conscripted

241 velliejohn, "Female soldiers... in battlefield 1.. my feedback," *Battlefield.com*, May 23, 2017, https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/108206/female-soldiers-in-battlefield-1-my-feedback.

242 zeldalinkring, "Russian Battalion of Death coming to multiplayer is stupid."

243 Yesman1035ktu, "Really DICE/EA I Thought You Were Better Than This!," *Battlefield.com*, May 22, 2017, https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/108203/really-dice-ea-i-thought-you-were-better-than-this: SuperSmith_, May 23, 2017, comment on LoganTheBrawler, "[BF1] Looks alot like FEMALE soilders coming to Battlefield 1! :)," *Battlefield*, May 22, 2017, https://www.reddit.com/r/Battlefield/comments/6co7io/bf1looks_alot_like_female_soilders_coming_to/dhwq96r

to die specifically because they were *men* and not women – there was nothing equal about it) is disrespectful imo."[244]

Women took a prominent place alongside non-white soldiers as a threat to the players' immersion into the historical setting. "Even though the game has things like experimental weapons and a lack of trench warfare, that is for game play mechanics that dont break the immersion and authenticity," wrote one player as they accepted certain historical inaccuracies, making it clear that "to add female soldiers just for the sake of diversity is something that completely breaks the authenticity of the game, no women would be fighting among men in ww1, it's just not believable." The inclusion of women, the player ultimately argued, was nothing but an attempt to pander to "the feminist outspoken minority".[245] For some players, the inclusion of women and the erasure of gender barriers was even more disturbing than the inclusion of non-white soldiers, with one Battlefield.com commenter going as far as to state that,

> It's not accurate but having female Soldiers is the worst possible thing that is happening to bf1, and not comparable to the amount experimental weapons additions, different types of races from men. [...] Gameplay Immersion and visuals is the fundamental part of the game. We want this game 50 % historical accurate as possible and 40 % inaccurate. Gender correctness is fundamental for the imagination and the cinematic of the war.[246]

The backlash against the inclusion of women in *Battlefield 1* is a reminder of the gendered dimensions of the white mythic space of the First World War, an aspect that has only been briefly touched upon in the previous chapter. Non-white soldiers are actively demasculinized in an effort to privilege the status of combat soldiers to white men. In the case of white women, however, the privilege of authenticity tied to white bodies is contradictorily torn down. Instead, the perceived inferiority of feminized bodies excludes women (white and non-white as well as non-white men) from being granted access to white, *masculine* martial spaces. The strong sexism that runs through the complaints surrounding the inclusion of women in the game reflects this belief.[247]

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244 VanquishTheVanity, May 23, 2017, comment on "[BF1]Looks alot like FEMALE soilders," https://www.reddit.com/r/Battlefield/comments/6co7io/bf1looks_alot_like_female_soilders_coming_to/dhxgvmi

245 ErcSt97, "My Problem with the Female Russian Scout," *Battlefield.com*, June 7, 2017, https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/110619/my-problem-with-the-female-russian-scout

246 velliejohn, May 23, 2017, comment on "Female soldiers... in battlefield 1.. my feedback," https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/comment/861460/#Comment_861460.

247 Even the announcer voice in the multiplayer mode that alerts the player of captured objectives, which by default is a woman's voice, caused frustration amongst some players who com-

This controversy was a hint of things to come in the future. The backlash that came with the initial reveal of the cover art of *Battlefield 1* in 2016 and the *In The Name of the Tsar* expansion in 2017 would happen again. On May 23, 2018, the reveal trailer for DICE's new installment in the *Battlefield* series, *Battlefield V*, set during the Second World War, was released. The intention behind the game followed the same philosophy of *Battlefield 1* in that the new game was meant to tell "the untold stories of World War II".[248] However, while the trailer for *Battlefield 1* had been received with great enthusiasm, the *Battlefield V* trailer caused an immediate backlash: the trailer, and the cover art for the game, featured a white woman as a combat soldier. Following the same pattern as the backlash against *Battlefield 1*, loud voices across social media flared up to protest against an inclusion that was seen as historically inaccurate, detrimental to immersion, and a way in which Electronic Arts and DICE were forcing political correctness onto players – arguments that would have sounded familiar to those involved in the *Battlefield 1* community. Yet there was an important difference. Harnessing the power of social media manipulation and online harassment that had grown exponentially with the rise of the alt-right since #GamerGate, Twitter users utilized the hashtag #NotMyBattlefield to call for a boycott of the game and to spread the common arguments used to reject the inclusion of women in *Battlefield 1* and *Battlefield V*.[249] While the racist backlash against non-white soldiers in *Battlefield 1* received very limited attention from media outlets, #NotMyBattlefield was given considerably more attention, with articles by *Polygon* and *Variety* even focusing on the pushback by the moderators of the Battlefield subreddit

plained. See Congaz, "Woman voice: "you lost object A"," *Battlefield.com*, June 12, 2016, https://forums.battlefield.com/en-us/discussion/1706/woman-voice-you-lost-object-a.

248 Vlad Savov, "Battlefield V returns to World War II this October," *The Verge*, May 23, 2018, https://www.theverge.com/2018/5/23/17384042/battlefield-5-release-date-trailer-video.

249 Megan Farokhmanesh, "Battlefield V fans who failed history are mad that the game has women in it," *The Verge*, May 24, 2018, https://www.theverge.com/2018/5/24/17388414/battlefield-v-fans-game-women-world-war-2-history. There has been several scholarly studies on the #NotMyBattlefield hashtag, see Oskar Larsson, "Appropriating Gaming: A Quantitative Content Analysis and Issue Mapping of the Online Campaign #NotMyBattlefield" (M.A. thesis, Malmö University, 2020); Loraine Gauteul, "The Digital Myth of Women on The Battlefield: A Reception Analysis of Female Soldiers in the Online Discourse of Battlefield V" (M.A. Thesis, Jönköping University, 2019); William Howe Jr., Dalaki Livingston, and Sun Kyong Lee, "Is #NotMyBattlefield Rooted in Gamer Identity? An Examination of Demographic Factors, Genre Preference, and Technology Use of Gamers," *Proceedings of the 52nd Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences* (2019): 2496 – 2505; Emil Lundedal Hammar, "The Political Economy of Cultural Memory in the Videogames Industry," *Digital Culture and Society* 5, no. 1 (2019): 61 – 83.

against arguments rejecting women from the game.[250] What is left unsaid in the articles, however, is that this pushback was not something new. It was a continuation of rules that were first put in place to prevent repeated questioning of the presence of black soldiers in *Battlefield 1*. With the exception of *The Verge*, no media outlet pointed out the continuity between the backlash against the two games. Another difference from two years prior was the fact that Electronic Arts and DICE explicitly and pointedly denounced the sexist reactions to *Battlefield V*. "Our commitment as a studio is to do everything we can to create games that are inclusive and diverse. We always set out to push boundaries and deliver unexpected experiences. But above all, our games must be fun! [...] This is #everyonesbattlefield," wrote DICE general manager Oskar Gabrielson on Twitter, while Electronic Arts chief creative officer Patrick Söderlund did not hold back his words in an interview when he stated that, "These are people who are uneducated—they don't understand that this is a plausible scenario, and listen: this is a game," adding that "we don't take any flak. We stand up for the cause, because I think those people who don't understand it, well, you have two choices: either accept it or don't buy the game. I'm fine with either or. It's just not ok."[251] In the midst of a new controversy surrounding inclusion, the racist backlash against *Battlefield 1* was seemingly forgotten or ignored, yet the game (and in extension, EA and DICE) continued to be ridiculed online by players for its inclusion of non-white soldiers. In a bizarre turn of events, players who *supported* the diversity present in *Battlefield 1* used the game's representation to criticize *Battlefield V* while nostalgically looking back at the game. "This game handled diversity fantastically and accurately," wrote one Reddit user, "The Russian battal-

250 Ben Winsor, "One of this year's biggest games has been accused of 'black-washing'," *The Feed*, November 3, 2016, https://www.sbs.com.au/news/the-feed/one-of-this-year-s-biggest-games-has-been-accused-of-black-washing; Owen S. Good, "Battlefield 5 subreddit tells members it's done with phony 'historical accuracy' arguments," *Polygon*, June 14, 2018, https://www.polygon.com/2018/6/14/17465314/battlefield-5-women-historical-accuracy-reddit-banned; "'Battlefield V' Subreddit Clamps Down on Whiny Misogynists," *Variety*, June 18, 2018, https://variety.com/2018/gaming/news/battlefield-v-subreddit-historical-accuracy-ban-1202849501.

251 Megan Farokhmanesh, "EA on the backlash against women in Battlefield V: 'Accept it or don't buy the game'," *The Verge*, June 12, 2018, https://www.theverge.com/2018/6/12/17453728/ea-women-in-battlefield-v-backlash-response; Kris Graft, "'This is not okay': EA minces no words on backlash against women in *Battlefield*," *Gamasutra*, June 11, 2018, https://www.gamasutra.com/view/news/319787/This_is_not_okay_EA_minces_no_words_on_backlash_against_women_in_Battlefield.php.

ion of death, the black German scout, the Harlem Hellfighters. Makes me wonder what went wrong with BFV."[252] *Battlefield 1* had become gaming history.

In conclusion, how well does DICE represent the diversity and global reach of the First World War in *Battlefield 1?* Within the context of the First World War centenary that sought to commemorate the overlooked multicultural aspects of the war, *Battlefield 1* followed the commemorations by including visible representations of soldiers of color. DICE's original vision of showing the unknown sides of the war, their desire to question preconceived ideas surrounding the war, and to present the players "not only with the parts that they expect but also the unexpected" within the limitations and expectations of an entertaining first-person shooter game was undoubtedly a challenge.[253] What *Battlefield 1* presented to its players was a representation of the First World War that stepped outside of the narrow boundaries that past representations in popular culture had been unable or unwilling to look beyond. Yes, the mud, the rain, the trenches, and notions of meaningless sacrifice on the Western front were still present, but these elements co-existed together with the sands of the Sinai desert, the towering heights of the Venetian alps, the urban sprawl of Amiens, and the depths of the Argonne forest. Although the settings that players could engage with in the game were considerably diverse, the geographic reach remained limited. Russia, Turkey, and the Middle East was the extent of the larger world outside of Europe that players were given a glimpse of. Ignored or forgotten are the battlefields on the African continent, stretching from British East Africa to German South West Africa, that experienced the full force of war in concurrence with the opening shots on the Western front and even extended beyond it, ending only on November 25, 1918, with the surrender of German forces at Abercorn (Mbala) in Northern Rhodesia (present day Zambia). The only mentions of this aspect of the First World War is in the Codex entries, imbedded in short texts about colonial troops or the world at war. Despite a genuine effort, *Battlefield 1* was unable to completely abandon the focus on Europe.

By placing an African American soldier on the cover of the game and making the soldier a focal point of the game's marketing, *Battlefield 1* chose not to center whiteness as the human face of the First World War. Yet the game failed

252 Sefrius, "This game handled diversity fantastically and accurately. The Russian battalion of death, the black German scout, the Harlem Hellfighters. Makes me wonder what went wrong with BFV," *Battlefield_One*, November 5, 2019, https://www.reddit.com/r/battlefield_one/comments/drpvsx/this_game_handled_diversity_fantastically_and.

253 Quote by DICE senior concept artist Robert Sammelin. Alex Donaldson, "Battlefield 1 interview: DICE talks fantasy war, realism and respect," *VG247*, August 22, 2016, https://www.vg247.com/2016/08/22/battlefield-1-interview-dice-talks-fantasy-war-realism-and-respect.

to make him into a protagonist. The war story centered on African American soldiers, *Storm of Steel*, is the shortest single player narrative in the game since it functions as a tutorial. Unlike the other war stories, all but one centered on a white male soldier, no black soldier featured in *Storm of Steel* is given a background, a motivation, or even a name that is not randomized. Fully decontextualized from their historical experience, the African American soldiers are there to die or be traumatized. This reductive representation of black soldiers removes them of meaningful representation, making them appear as one-dimensional characters whose only reason for existence is to support the agency of the white protagonists whose stories you can only access after you play *Storm of Steel*.

Battlefield 1 is undoubtedly a step forward in the representation of the multiracial aspects of the First World War, including the first ever representation of an Afro-German soldier from the time period. The majority of the diversity present in the game could be found in the multiplayer feature where non-white soldiers were given a visible role to play on par with white soldiers and that attracted a strong racist backlash from certain parts of the player base. While many non-white players found this inclusion to be a welcome addition after years of predominantly white representation in historical first-person shooter games, black players found *Storm of Steel* disturbing in its depiction of relentless black death. *Battlefield 1* succeeded in challenging preconceptions about the First World War, but the game did not go as far as it could have in its depiction of the multiracial war. Within the limits of making an entertaining game, *Battlefield 1* could have provided a meaningful narrative about a black soldier that reflected a painful and complex historical past that they inhibit and whose story is often overlooked. Although the soldiers of color on the screen are proud and martial, they remain without a voice of their own.

Conclusion – A Continuity of Whiteness

In *The Negro In Our History*, first published in 1922, African American historian Carter G. Woodson wrote that the "very uniform on a Negro was to the reactionary like a red rag thrown in the face of a bull."[254] It would be difficult to find a more accurate description of the nature surrounding the racist backlash by players to the inclusion of non-white solders in *Battlefield 1*. However, Woodson was

254 Carter G. Woodson, *The Negro In Our History* (Washington D.C.: The Associated Publishers, 1941), 527.

writing in the context of the white response in post-war United States to demobilized and returning black veterans from France. The uniformed African American who asserted his rightful claim to civil rights was a symbol of hope for the African American community during and after the war, but became a dangerous symbol to white supremacists who desired to uphold the racial status quo in the United States. In order to reassert white supremacy in the light of the present threat of African Americans demanding equal rights, whites turned to collective antiblack violence. From the violence targeting African Americans in Charleston, South Carolina, in December 1918, a month after hostilities has ceased on the Western front, to the horrific race massacre in Tulsa, Oklahoma in the early summer of 1921, this period of collective antiblack violence saw black veterans participating in the armed self-defense of their communities, some even wearing the uniform they had worn in the trenches on the Western front. For African Americans, the uniform was an emblem of racial equality, democracy, and black manhood. As in Woodson's description, the very sight of an African American man wearing an army uniform provoked white anger and violence. Returning black veterans throughout the American South were stopped by groups of white men at train stations who forced them to remove their uniforms. In Blakely, Georgia, African American veteran Wilbur Little was lynched in April 1919 because he defied repeated white demands for him to remove his uniform. The same year that Woodson published his history book, Carrie Williams Clifford penned a poem, "The Black Draftee from Georgia," inspired by the Wilbur Little incident that concludes: "Where from the hell of war he never flinched / Because he cried, "Democracy," was lynched."[255] Collective antiblack violence was not reserved for the United States alone. Racial violence targeting black British and other non-white communities took place in various towns and cities throughout Great Britain in 1919. On June 5, 1919, Charles Wotten, a black British seaman who had served in the Royal Navy during the First World War, was murdered by a crowd of white rioters in Liverpool. Racial hostility towards black soldiers in Liverpool, and elsewhere in Britain, was not something new in 1919, as the *Liverpool Echo* made clear on June 29, 1915, when it informed its readers that the "stipen-

255 Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy*, 223–260; David F. Krugler, *1919, The Year of Racial Violence: How African Americans Fought Back* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 15–130; David A. Davis, "Not Only War Is Hell: World War I and African American Lynching Narratives," *African American Review* 42, no. 3/4 (2008): 477.

diary magistrate made it clear today that black men in Liverpool must not be insulted whilst they are wearing the King's uniform."[256]

In investigating the racist backlash against *Battlefield 1*, one of the more disturbing aspects that I found was how many of the arguments echoed the contemporary wartime arguments against allowing non-white men, particularly of African ancestry, to serve as combat soldiers. The discomfort and indignation by certain players at seeing uniformed non-white soldiers in the game provoked anger, disgust, confusion, and mockery. More urgently, it provoked action. Unwilling to allow the presence of non-white soldiers in a setting where they supposedly did not belong to go unchallenged, some players resorted to actively questioning and protesting against non-white inclusion. Other players created imagery that racialized soldiers of color and brought specific attention to the "otherness" of their bodies. Some went as far as to completely erase non-white bodies from the game, restoring white supremacy in the process. No matter the racist action taken, what all these approaches have in common is that they are based on a very firm preconceived idea of what place non-white men had in European First World War armies. In similarity with early twentieth century white recruiting officers or draft boards, players made their judgement on the eligibility and appropriate roles of non-white men within a military context. The final verdict of the players was that non-white men were unfit to be combat soldiers in the game. The rightful place for a non-white man, they argued, would have been in a non-combat role (such as laborer, cook, or musician) or not be present at all. Non-white masculinity is denied and suppressed through the forced imposition of an inferior non-combat status upon them. The active marginalization by some players of the actual historical participation of non-white men in the First World War results in the delegitimization of non-white combat service in order to privilege white masculinity and martial prowess. This is particularly evident in the repeated calls for respect on behalf of white First World War soldiers. The white men who fought and died in the war, and in extension the uniform that they fought in, is disrespected by the presence of non-white soldiers and it would be insulting, they continued to argue, to have white men being "replaced" by soldiers of color. These arguments would not have been out of place a hundred years earlier. Canadian Lieutenant General Willoughby G. Gwatkin, writing a memorandum about the possibility of raising a battalion consisting of black Canadians for combat in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, stated that

256 Costello, *Black Tommies*, 61–62, 138–151; Bourne, *Black Poppies*, 193–230; see also Jacqueline Jenkinson, *Black 1919: Riots, Racism and Resistance in Imperial Britain* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009).

"the average white man will not associate with him on terms of equality.... It would be humiliating to the coloured men themselves to serve in a battalion where they are not wanted. In France, in the firing line, there would be no place for a black battalion, CEF. It would be eyed askance; it would crowd out a white battalion." Another Canadian, commanding officer of the 104th Battalion Lieutenant Colonel George Fowler, turned away over 20 volunteers on account of the men being black Canadians, justifying his decision by arguing that, "I have been fortunate to have secured a very fine class of recruits, and I did not think it was fair to these men that they should have to mingle with negroes."[257] Players did more than simply call upon the memory of deceased white veterans of the war. They identified with both the historical soldiers and their digital counterparts in the game, relating in extension to a transnational white memory of martial masculinity that sees blackness as a threat to white hegemony. Yet while non-white soldiers did historically participate in the First World War as combat soldiers, both in their own segregated units as well as alongside white soldiers in violation of official or unofficial policies, the players that were investigated in the previous chapter go even further in trying to secure the racial hierarchy. They deny soldiers of color any space whatsoever. The fear of encroachment and reversal of an established social order that marginalizes people of color resulted in players continuing the denial of agency and space of people of color, specifically black men, that was carried out during and after the First World War.

Yet these players did not wake up one morning and decide that non-white soldiers did not fight in the First World War or, as other commenters have contended, that the presence of non-white men and women in Europe is a recent phenomenon. I have argued in this investigation that with the help of the theoretical framework of the white mythic space we can find the roots of these racist beliefs and expose the strategies that are used by which the beliefs are not only reinforced among their believers but also spread and defended. As I have shown in the first chapter, the specific white mythic space that the players call upon has its origins during the immediate aftermath of the First World War as soldiers of color were beginning to be marginalized from commemorations and the broader historical memory of the war. The white soldier fighting in the mud and horror of the Western front became the dominant image of the war that was spread not only through historical images, history classes, popular history books, and documentaries, but also through films, television shows, and novels. In popular culture representations, the First World War was established as a white man's war

257 Timothy C. Winegard, *For King and Kanata: Canadian Indians and the First World War* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2012), 79 – 80.

while the war on the African continent was relegated to an obscure sideshow within the larger context of the war. While the representation of the First World War as a multiracial and multicultural war would begin to be popularized towards the end of the twentieth century, and pick up speed during the centenary beginning in 2014, the view of the war as a white war lived on in the white mythic space. The strongest myths are those that appear to be natural, a reflection of reality. In the context of the white mythic space of the First World War, *actual* history is therefore considered inaccurate because it does not correspond to the reality supposedly present in the myth. The notion of "historical accuracy", a term often used to defend the white mythic space, is paradoxically inverted. While authenticity lite, as Kempshall describes it, allows players and game creators to negotiate and craft a visual authenticity that opens for a willing suspension of belief, the white mythic space allows no room for negotiation and any perceived encroachment is defended against. Both terms refer to a constructed authenticity, with authenticity lite being the "constructed authenticity of ephemera and emotional context."[258] In the white mythic space, only the constructed authenticity of a hegemonic white presence can grant a willing suspension of belief. The exclusion or marginalization of non-white bodies is therefore a requirement for a historical representation to be considered historically authentic.

What the players in this investigation are calling for is a white history that excludes people of color. The white mythic space as a model of authenticity privileges whiteness and white bodies with legitimacy. It is not questioned because it is seen as natural and is expected to be present in a white space. The result is racial segregation through the creation of separate racial spheres that people of color are assigned to. European soldiers of African ancestry in *Battlefield 1*, for example, could only be colonial African soldiers in the view of some players who argued that it made no sense for European armies to have black soldiers because they had no historical black population. The delineation of a white European sphere and a black African sphere in the context of the First World War became a common way to argue for the exclusion of black soldiers from the game, with repetitive arguments spreading throughout forums and comment fields to the point of becoming conventional wisdom. The consequence of this is not only that race becomes geographically fixed, reflecting everyday racism that Europeans of African ancestry have to encounter on a daily basis, but that it erases people of color from history. They are denied a European history on the basis of their race. In the best case scenario when dealing with believers of the white mythic space, people of color have to legitimize their presence in a supposedly

258 Kempshall, *The First World War in Computer Games*, 8.

homogenously white history with no guarantee that they will be heard by people who reduce their history to being trivial or a "historical inaccuracy." This dehumanization of people of color is a display of the real life consequences of the white mythic space and its racist underpinnings. It provides a rationale for the rejection of people of color in both fiction and reality. An important function of myths is to provide answers and explanations about reality. In answering the important question "whose history matters?", the white mythic space immediately and confidently responds: only white history matters.

Players did not only resort to invoking historical racism and a whitewashed understanding of the past. It became evident in investigating the discourse of the players that the white mythic space of the First World War entered into a mutual conversation with contemporary forms of white nationalist and far-right racism where both parties helped reinforce the other. While the white mythic space provides an understanding of how the past is meant to be represented, it does not provide explanations for why there would be those who would want to challenge a white hegemonic representation of history. For the adherents of the white mythic space, far-right conspiracy theories consequently helped provide explanations for who and what was behind the "blackwashing" of the First World War. Drawing on arguments with origins in the online #GamerGate movement, commenters accused Electronic Arts and DICE of pushing a nefarious politically correct left-wing agenda onto the players of *Battlefield 1* by rewriting history and "forcing diversity" on them through the unnecessary inclusion of soldiers of color in a time and place where they did not belong. Simultaneously, Electronic Arts and DICE were accused of pandering to the black gaming community and "Social Justice Warriors" instead of focusing on their supposedly core audience: white heterosexual men. Conspiracy theories like the white nationalist "Great Replacement theory", the far-right boogeyman "Cultural Marxism", and ideas of a dystopian liberal Sweden (where DICE has its headquarters) that has bowed to a destructive multiculturalism were all called upon to explain the reasons for why the video game industry would produce a historical game that includes people of color. This complex entanglement of arguments displays the core racist message that argues for the inauthenticity of black bodies and shows how historical racism coincides with contemporary racism in addition to anti-Semitic conspiracy theories. The utmost importance of white history, and the privileged status it is meant to have, could not be allowed to be challenged. The spread of explicitly racist memes targeting and mocking the claim of non-white participation in the First World War normalized hateful imagery. The consequence is that players, in particular young players, had the potential of becoming radicalized by far-right movements online, many of which target teenagers as potential recruits through

the use of youth culture such as video games.[259] The belief in the "blackwashing" of history could potentially become a step into an even more hateful and dangerous world, something that is tragically evident in the 17-year-old who on Battlefield.com proposed "Cultural Marxism" as an explanation for the inclusion of non-white soldiers in *Battlefield 1* while admitting that they were not fully informed "on all this."

The racist backlash against *Battlefield 1* has to be considered beyond the confinement of its specific gaming communities and be understood as part of a larger pattern of white mythic spaces. The *Battlefield 1* controversy was bookended by the release of the first two *Star Wars* films of the new sequel trilogy: *The Force Awakens* (2015) and *The Last Jedi* (2017). Each film was faced with its own racist controversy that was directed against the inclusion of non-white characters in important parts. In similarity with *Battlefield 1*, the release of the teaser and first trailer of *The Force Awakens* caused a racist backlash online due to the casting of black British actor John Boyega as Finn, a Stormtrooper-turned-resistance fighter. Calling upon the white mythic space of Star Wars, racist commenters complained about the supposed inaccuracy of including a black Stormtrooper in the film. Some even called for a boycott of the film through the #BoycottStarWarsVII hashtag on Twitter.[260] John Boyega responded to the racist backlash on Instagram by telling them to "get used to it," adding later in an interview that "I'm not saying get used to the future, but what is already happening. People of color and women are increasingly being shown on-screen. For things to be whitewashed just doesn't make sense."[261] Following the release of *The Last Jedi*, racist backlash again occurred due to the inclusion of the character Rose Tico, played by Asian American actress Kelly Marie Tran. Misogynistic and racist comments against both the fictional character and her actress were prolific and Kelly Marie Tran became the target of an online harassment cam-

259 Mark Townsend, "How far right uses video games and tech to lure and radicalise teenage recruits," *The Guardian*, February 14, 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/feb/14/how-far-right-uses-video-games-tech-lure-radicalise-teenage-recruits-white-supremacists.

260 Justin Carissimo, "Racists are tweeting #BoycottStarWarsVII because a lead actor is black," *The Independent*, October 19, 2016, https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/news/racists-are-tweeting-boycottstarwarsvii-because-lead-actor-black-a6700636.html; Jen Yamato, "Racists Urge Boycott of 'Star Wars: Episode VII' Over Black Lead, and Most of Them Love Trump," *The Daily Beast*, October 19, 2015, https://www.thedailybeast.com/racists-urge-boycott-of-star-wars-episode-vii-over-black-lead-and-most-of-them-love-trump.

261 David Renshaw, "John Boyega," *VMan*, October 7, 2015, https://vman.com/article/john-boyega.

paign which ultimately led to her quitting social media.[262] In an essay for *The New York Times*, she wrote candidly about the real life consequences of white mythic spaces: "It wasn't their words, it's that I started to believe them," she wrote. "Their words seemed to confirm what growing up as a woman and a person of color already taught me: that I belonged in margins and spaces, valid only as a minor character in their lives and stories."[263] Just as non-white men cannot be granted the status of combat soldier, of being heroic, or be granted respect as veterans within the white mythic space of the First World War, the role of a heroic lead part in *Star Wars* was reserved for white men and women by the believers in the white mythic space of *Star Wars*. Just as there was a very real presence of soldiers of color who fought in the First World War, there is a precedence of a non-white presence in *Star Wars* that is best defined by the character Lando Calrissian (played by African American actor Billy Dee Williams) who first appeared in *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980). The trajectory of the racist and misogynistic *Star Wars* fans and *Battlefield 1* players are similar in their increasingly hateful discourse, their reliance on far-right conspiracy theories to explain the unexplainable, and the rejection of people of color in spaces believed to be hegemonic white spaces. While the two white mythic spaces have different origins and use different arguments suited to a specific context for their rejection of people of color, the two spaces overlap with each other and other white mythic spaces. In December 2017, believers in the white mythic space could comfortably have moved between the comment section of a *Battlefield 1* video on YouTube and a Twitter discussion about *The Last Jedi* in order to spread the same message about exclusion. If you can deny the presence of soldiers of color in the past, you can just as easily deny the presence of people of color in a galaxy far, far away. Yet just like the representation of African American soldiers in the single player narrative of *Battlefield 1*, the *Star Wars* sequel trilogy did not manage to fully provide a meaningful representation for people of color. By the last film of the trilogy, *The Rise of Skywalker* (2019), the characters played by John Boyega and Kelly Marie Tran had been sidelined. In Boyega's own words, "do not bring out a black character, market them to be much more important in the franchise than they are and then have them pushed to the side. [...] They knew what to do

262 Pauline Reyes, "'The Last Jedi' star Kelly Marie Tran defended by fans from racist, sexist comments," *Inquirer*, December 28, 2017, https://pop.inquirer.net/45178/the-last-jedi-star-kelly-marie-tran-defended-by-fans-from-racist-sexist-comments; Chris Jancelewicz, "Kelly Marie Tran, 'Last Jedi' actor, faces racist online harassment," *Global News*, December 29, 2017, https://globalnews.ca/news/3938205/kelly-marie-tran-last-jedi-racism.

263 Kelly Marie Tran, "I Won't Be Marginalized by Online Harassment," *The New York Times*, August 21, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/21/movies/kelly-marie-tran.html.

with these other people, but when it came to Kelly Marie Tran, when it came to John Boyega, [Disney] know fuck all."[264]

The existence of white mythic spaces across different media is something that I have established in order to explain why there are those who reject people of color, particularly people of African ancestry, from popular representations of history. What does the investigation carried out in this book contribute to the study of video games and racial representation? The purpose of this book has been to connect historical studies to video game studies in order to show how the intersection of racism and historical memory can be a fruitful way to analyze the representation of race in historical video games. Past research into the subject of how video games represent history has for the most part focused on the perspective of producers and designers and the means by which they have attempted to construct historical authenticity in their games, in addition to considering historical video games as public history. There is little doubt that the representation of history in video games helps shape the historical consciousness and historical memory of its players, but what if the content of the game does not correspond with the preconceived ideas about the past that the players have? This clash between players and producers over the depiction of race in a historical setting has been the central conflict in this book. By considering the perspective of the players rather than the producers, we are provided with a completely different angle to understand how video games represent history and shape identities. The players under investigation in this book brought with them a specific historical memory to the game that influenced how they engaged with its depiction of the First World War. Through the theoretical framework of the white mythic space, we can understand how and why the historical representation in *Battlefield 1* posed a direct challenge to these players and why they were unable to accept it. In order to reject people of color from the virtual First World War, players weaponized historical memory. Using the white mythic space as a trench club, players demanded change and the restitution of white representation in the game. Players called for the game to respect their notion of historical accuracy and white identity, anchored in the sacrifice of young,

264 Jimi Famurewa, "John Boyega: 'I'm the only cast member whose experience of Star Wars was based on their race'," *GQ*, September 2, 2020, https://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/culture/article/john-boyega-interview-2020; Michael Cavna, "Many Star Wars fans are upset the new movie sidelines Kelly Marie Tran's character. The writer is trying to explain," *The Washington Post*, December 31, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/arts-entertainment/2019/12/31/many-star-wars-fans-are-upset-new-movie-sidelines-kelly-marie-trans-character-writer-is-trying-explain; Angela Watercutter, "John Boyega Is Right About Star Wars," *Wired*, September 4, 2020, https://www.wired.com/story/john-boyega-star-wars.

white men on the battlefields in France and Belgium, a cornerstone of First World War remembrance and heritage in Europe. When words did not suffice to cause change and feeling threatened by the game's representation of history, players modified game code, reported the presence of soldiers of color as errors in the programming, and used assets and imagery from the game in order to mock it in a racist manner. *Battlefield 1* became a contested space over history, remembrance, and representation where different meanings surrounding the inclusion of non-white soldiers, specifically of African ancestry, were disputed and debated by various groups of players against the backdrop of the original intentions of the game producers. The contested space that historical video games truly are should be given more attention in video games studies. The influence of a video game's historical representation is not a one-way street but happens in dialogue with different historical memories that players bring with them, one of which will always be the more extreme white mythic space which does not allow room for negotiation. Just as there will be those who eagerly embrace the depiction of history in a video game as authentic lite and incorporates it into their historical consciousness, there will be those who will actively resist it and deem the representation to be inaccurate and outright false. The importance of race in this context cannot be overlooked by future researchers and it is not limited to historical video games. It is not an incorrect uniform, the appearance of magical monsters, or the physics of a spaceship that some players complain about in video games. They complain about the discomfort of being "forced" to play as a black character or seeing a world populated by people of color. Race as a category to analyze video games, in particularly historical video games, and its reception amongst players has to be given a more prominent place alongside more common analytic categories. Failure to do so would contribute to the continuing of "othering" non-white perspectives and leave the white norm of video games unquestioned.

Let us consider the view of non-white players and the importance of meaningful representation in video games. The creators of *Battlefield 1* set out to make a game that explicitly highlighted the diversity of the First World War. While they were successful in decentralizing whiteness to a greater extent than previous representations of the historical conflict in popular media, I argue that they failed to provide a meaningful and positive representation of soldiers of color in the single player narrative. Instead of giving African American soldiers an agency of their own set within their historical context, the virtual Harlem Hellfighters in *Storm of Steel* are turned into a spectacle of black suffering and death in the tradition of past white representations of African American soldiers. Echoing John Boyega's words, Electronic Arts and DICE marketed the African American inclusion in the game to be more important than it actually was but

then proceeded to sideline them in the game. They knew what to do with the white protagonists in the game who were given complete narratives, but left the African Americans as an anonymous mass of black, dead bodies in the shortest narrative of the game. As Gray and Leonard reveal, the consequence of this depiction was that it left black players uncomfortable at not only witnessing but through actually experiencing black suffering through playing the game. Herein lies the central problem of *Battlefield 1*'s representation of race. By continuing the marginalization of people of color, despite efforts for increased diversity, you are allowing for the continuity of whiteness. This applies not only to the historical depiction present in the game, but also to the development of the game. The importance of black producers, black writers, and black game developers makes itself known through these empty acts of inclusion. A report from the National Research Group found that four in five African Americans thought it was obvious when a character of color in popular media was not written by someone of that race.[265] People of color working on the game would have understood the discomfort that the depiction of African American soldiers carried with it and would have detected the one-dimensional portrayal that stood out in comparison to the other white-centric narratives. The risk of inclusion and diversity simply becoming meaningless buzzwords in the form of tokenism is always present. Diversity in video games goes both ways and requires people of color to work in developing games as much as it requires people of color to be represented in the game. Seemingly unaware of the wider historical context of African American participation in the war, *Battlefield 1* gave their participation in the war a universalist narrative that was historiographically out of date by over 50 years.[266] Hiring and consulting scholars of African American history or the non-white participation in the First World War could have helped fix these problems. The same time, care, and attention to detail that the developers of *Battlefield 1* put into accurately recreating weapons should also have gone into accurately depicting soldiers of color and their experiences during the war.

Representation is important. Yet two in three African Americans say that they do not see themselves, or their culture, being represented in films and television.[267] There are likely to be even fewer when it comes to representation in

265 National Research Group, *#RepresentationMatters: Content as a Mirror to Culture* (New York: National Research Group 2020), 11.

266 Kempshall has accurately pinpointed how, despite claiming to draw on modern scholarship, the producers of *Battlefield 1* lacked a wider understanding of the historical First World War and reproduced old myths about the conflict, while causing controversy in Italy by missing important historical context. See Kempshall, "War collaborators," 6–7.

267 National Research Group, *#RepresentationMatters*, 2.

video games. Historical video games have the ability to shape a lifelong historical consciousness surrounding a specific historical event. Positive and meaningful representations of people of color in historical video games can therefore leave lasting imprints on the historical consciousness of many, effectively breaking the continuity of whiteness so often present in popular depictions of history. Although there will be those who will invoke the white mythic spaces of history in order to deny the important representation of people of color, we should never give in to the views of those clinging on to an imaginary racial hierarchy. Like one African American user on Reddit put it, "a few white people getting upset about 'historical accuracy' is worth it if my friends, my family, and my kids can actually feel included for once, feel like we're part of something we love, feel accepted and involved."[268]

Future – The End of the White Mythic Space?

The scene is one familiar to viewers of many period films set in the early twentieth century. The bustling train station in London during the First World War is crowded with soldiers embarking the train that will start their journey to the front. We are shown a couple sharing a last few intimate moments together, a trio of soldiers sharing a last drink before embarkation, and family members bidding farewell to their loved ones. Visible in this crowd of white British soldiers, uniformed nurses, and civilians are non-white soldiers. Two different groupings of soldiers from British India are shown to be a natural part of the military crowd. We see not only uniformed Sikhs wearing khaki turbans, but also Muslim soldiers, recognizable by the canonical headpiece (*khulla*) that set their turban apart from other soldiers from British India. Later in the scene, as the soldiers disembark from the train in order to reach the ferry that will take them to France, we also spot *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* in the steady stream of soldiers making their way to the docks. Yet to the viewer, it is not these soldiers who are out of place. Instead, it is Diana, the Amazonian warrior princess of Themyscira, that the viewers focus on as the fantastical element in an otherwise historically grounded setting. *Wonder Woman* (2017) continued the trend of normalizing the visible inclusion of soldiers of color in First World War settings.

268 Lonesome_Gavlan, March 3, 2017, comment on "Has this game gone beyond the PALE of political correctness ???," https://www.reddit.com/r/battlefield_one/comments/5ziyif/_/deyofnm.

The period between the start of the centenary in 2014 through 2016 experienced a never-before seen increase in popular depictions of the multiracial aspects of the First World War. Subsequent depictions from 2017 onwards built upon this foundation to some extent. In the United States, the 2017 centenary of their entry into the war brought renewed attention to the participation of African American soldiers and while there was a strong focus on the Harlem Hellfighters, other black stories were being told as well. In speculative fiction, the HBO superhero mini-series *Watchmen* (2019) included flashbacks of the protagonist's ancestor who was an African American soldier during the First World War and featured a stirring depiction of the Tulsa race massacre in its first episode. The historical drama *The 24th* (2020) depicted the Houston riot of 1917 that occurred as a result of white racism towards black soldiers of the segregated 24th Infantry Regiment stationed in Texas. The docufiction film, *Farewell My Indian Soldier* (2016), was the first Indian film ever set during the First World War, followed two years afterwards by the war drama *Sajjan Singh Rangroot* (2018) that follows the titular character, a Sikh soldier, on the Western front. Soldiers of color were also present in other forms of visual media, such as the Native American graphic novel *Soldiers Unknown* (2019) about the Western front experiences of three young Yurok men and the first-person shooter *Verdun* (2015) that introduced the *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* into the game as part of a free expansion in late 2018. In Great Britain, a multimedia installation by John Akomfrah titled *Mimesis: African Soldier* focused on the African participation in the war and was first shown at the Imperial War Museum in London on September 21, 2018. A few weeks later, on the centenary of the November 11, 1918 armistice, a different art project titled *Pages of the Sea* and directed by Danny Boyle displayed large portraits of men and women who participated in the First World War on 32 beaches across the United Kingdom. With the rising of the tide, the portraits would vanish into the sea. Among the beach portraits were portraits of black British officer Walter Tull and the first Nepalese Gurkha to win the Victoria Cross, Kulbir Thapa. They were shown on beaches in Ayr, Ayrshire, and Lyme Regis, Dorset, respectively.[269]

The most popular and critically acclaimed depiction of the First World War during this period came in the form of the British film *1917* (2019). Nominated for 10 Academy Awards and the winner of the BAFTA Award for Best Film, *1917* follows two young white British soldiers on the Western front as they attempt to de-

269 For more information about these art projects that were commissioned or co-commissioned by the United Kingdom's art programme for the First World War centenary, 14–18 NOW, see "Mimesis: African Soldier," *14–18 NOW*, https://www.1418now.org.uk/commissions/african-soldier and "Pages of the Sea," *14–18 NOW*, https://www.pagesofthesea.org.uk.

liver a message to call off an attack that is doomed to fail and cause countless of unnecessary British casualties. Throughout the film, we can spot soldiers of color, such as several black British soldiers depicted as part of otherwise all-white battalions. In a scene half-way in the film, the protagonist is given a ride on a truck carrying soldiers who had been separated from their units. One of the soldiers is a Sikh soldier, Sepoy Jondalar, who is shown joking and conversing with the other soldiers in the truck, even facing mockery by another soldier who tells him that "you barely even speak the bloody language," only for Jondalar to be defended by another soldier. Throughout the scene, Jondalar is shown as a sympathetic character who is given the same amount of screen time and dialogue as the other white characters in the scene. His presence is part of the natural landscape of the First World War as depicted in the film. "I hope you get there," Jondalar tells the protagonist as he parts way with the soldiers in the truck, facing a new obstacle that he has to overcome in order to fulfill his mission. The inclusion of soldiers of color in the film was a conscious choice made by the film's director, Sam Mendes, who in an interview acknowledged the multiracial nature of the Western front by mentioning the presence of British Indian and British West Indian regiments, stated that he "wanted to reflect and acknowledge that it wasn't just a war fought by white men."[270]

In more ways than one, *1917* is the culmination of the increased representation of the multiracial First World War that begun to be popularized in the lead up to the centenary. *1917*, which was called "a movie that feels like a videogame" by some critics due to its use of different editing techniques to make the film look like it was done in one continuous long take,[271] followed in the footsteps of *Battlefield 1* as a high profile project that will undoubtedly help shape the historical memory (and therefore the historical consciousness) of the First World War of a new generation. Yet just like *Battlefield 1*, *1917* attracted the attention of online racists as a result of its depiction of soldiers of color serving alongside white soldiers. Comments questioning the presence of non-white soldiers in the war became a common sight on Reddit after the release of the film. "Was "1917" playing fast and loose with historical accuracy for the sake in inclusivity? I feel like they could have accomplished this with showing Black West Indian, and In-

270 Phil de Semlyen, "Sam Mendes: 'There were days when making "1917" seemed ridiculous'," *Time Out London*, January 6, 2020, https://www.timeout.com/london/film/sam-mendes-there-were-days-when-making-1917-seemed-ridiculous.

271 Tyler Coates, "1917 Is a Movie That Feels Like a Videogame—in a Good Way," *Wired*, January 3, 2020, https://www.wired.com/story/1917-videogame-movie; James Grebey, "1917 Is a Video Game Come to Life," *GQ*, December 24, 2019, https://www.gq.com/story/1917-is-a-video-game-come-to-life.

dian units (Black Africans were busy fighting the Germans in Africa), not by showing unrealistically diverse British units," read the conclusion of one post by Reddit user wreckanoyter, who in similarity with other users used many of the same strategies utilized by *Battlefield 1* players in separating the First World War into a white sphere and a black sphere without overlap.[272] In another representative example, a user elaborating on their question "Were there Black or Sikh units in the British army during WWI ?" revealed the inquirer's need to defend the white mythic space in the guise of "historical accuracy":

> There were a few instances were I sort of rolled my eyes during the movie. The first time was when I saw a token Black British soldier in the trenches with pretty much all White British soldiers. I thought this was an intentional diversity placement. [...] So, were there Black and Sikh soldiers fighting for the British and were they all in their own units or didintegrate with them ? With today's ultra politically correct climate, this seemed like an intentional "oh look how PC and diverse we are !"" from the director/producer(s). And before you get offended, this has been happening in movies a lot recently and a lot of people, especially people who want historical accuracy in their films like myself, are getting irritated by this.[273]

It is difficult not to feel a sense of déjà vu when reading these comments. The need to question the presence of soldiers of color, cries of "forced diversity", claims of historical inaccuracies, accusations of political correctness, and the segregation and marginalization of non-white soldiers. Yet again did the real and historical presence of soldiers of color in a popular depiction of the First World War require justification. The white mythic space of the First World War had returned in full force.

Yet it would not be the anonymous comments on Reddit that would thrust the white mythic space into the limelight to become a center of its own controversy. Instead, it was the appearance of British actor Laurence Fox on the January 17, 2020 episode of the James Delingpole podcast that would bring attention to the racist discourse surrounding *1917*. "It's very heightened awareness of the colour of someone's skin because of the oddness in the casting," Fox stated in the podcast, "Even in 1917 they've done it with a Sikh soldier, which is great, it's brilliant, but you're suddenly aware there were Sikhs fighting in this war. And you're like 'OK, you're now diverting me away from what the story is'." Fur-

272 wreckanoyter, "1917: Black soldiers if the BEF," *History*, November 27, 2020, https://www.reddit.com/r/history/comments/k1t9f0/1917_black_soldiers_if_the_bef.

273 thesquarerootof1, "Were there Black or Sikh units in the British army during WWI? This question is related to the new movie 1917," *AskHistorians*, January 15, 2020, https://www.reddit.com/r/AskHistorians/comments/ep82r9/were_there_black_or_sikh_units_in_the_british.

ther expressing a belief in that "there is something institutionally racist about forcing diversity on people in that way," Fox's racist comments followed a well-established pattern that can be identified with the white mythic space of the First World War.[274] Defending his comments on *Good Morning Britain*, Fox turned to the notion of his "immersion" being broken by arguing that it would have "been less incongruous to me if [the protagonist] had got on the truck to a whole regiment of Sikh soldiers," rather than a lone Sikh soldier amongst other white British soldiers.[275] The comments were met with wide public criticism, much of which centered on bringing up the fact that Sikh soldiers, and the British Indian army at large, made a visible contribution to the British war effort during the conflict. While Fox ultimately apologized for "being clumsy in the way I have expressed myself over this matter in recent days," the unintended consequence of his racist comments was that the controversy around them ultimately brought a lot of public attention to the participation of Sikh soldiers. In the words of the chairman of the UK Punjab Heritage Association, Amandeep Singh Madra, "I am grateful to Fox. We spent 12 weeks doing an exhibition [*Empire, Faith & War – The Sikhs and World War 1*] and we didn't get the same level of press coverage."[276]

However, Fox's racist comments about the inclusion of a soldier of color could be seen and was written off as a unique exception by the general public. The general view was that they were simply bigoted, ignorant comments spoken by an equally ignorant man who needed to be criticized and corrected. While this thought is undoubtedly comforting to those who believe racism and amnesia about the past is exclusive to a select few, loud individuals, I have shown through the investigation in this book that Fox's comments fits within a larger pattern of the white mythic space of the First World War. His criticism of *1917* should be considered a defense of the white mythic space from the "oddness" in witnessing the inclusion of soldiers of color and to safeguard a continuity of whiteness. Fox was far from alone in defending it.

The First World War centenary resulted in many genuine efforts to acknowledge and increase awareness of the presence and participation of people of color

274 "Laurence Fox apologises to Sikhs for 'clumsy' 1917 comments," *BBC*, January 24, 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-51233734.

275 Lucy Mapstone, "Laurence Fox defends saying 'a lot of unfortunate things'," *Yahoo! News*, January 22, 2020, https://uk.news.yahoo.com/laurence-fox-defends-saying-lot-110524216.html.

276 "Laurence Fox apologises to Sikhs for 'clumsy' 1917 comments"; Hardeep Singh, "Laurence Fox's 'clumsy' criticism of 1917 is good for British Sikhs," *The Spectator*, January 25, 2020, https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/laurence-fox-s-clumsy-criticism-of-1917-is-good-for-british-sikhs.

on the Western front. Ranging from the films, television shows, and video games that I have discussed in this book to documentaries, books, community projects, exhibitions, and other forms of memorialization that focused specifically on the multiracial aspect of the war, these efforts helped contribute to a greater emphasis on the global aspects of the First World War and to reorient the public image of the war away from being a white man's war. Yet as Santanu Das has pointed out, there "has been a central tension here between this much-needed expansion of war memory and a simultaneous process of sanitisation of the painful dimensions of colonial war service from that narrative."[277] The history of the First World War, and popular representations of it, will always be incomplete without the inclusion of soldiers of color. In a larger sense, the history of Great Britain, France, and Germany can never be fully understood without understanding the historical connections between Europe, Africa, and Asia. It is a shared history grounded in the history of colonialism, slavery, racism, and exploitation, but also transnational cultural exchanges, immigration, and hybridity. Proper recognition of the role that men and women of color played in the First World War requires recognizing and integrating the important and painful elements that made their historical presence possible in the first place.

To create meaningful inclusions of soldiers of color into the dominant historical memory of the First World War that goes beyond one-dimensional celebrations of war heroes or remembrance of martyrs requires that one not only acknowledges how historical memory has been used in the past to exclude the historical experiences of people of color, but also faces uncomfortable or difficult questions that could disturb the current state of the dominant historical memory. Beyond acknowledging the European participation in colonialism and slavery, and the legacy that it still has on our modern day world, one has to acknowledge painful historical truths related to the First World War that recognizes the widespread forced conscription of non-white colonial soldiers to fight in Europe and how racism and discrimination played an important role in the experiences of soldiers of color. One has to acknowledge the fact that European powers continued to wage violence against the inhabitants of its colonies before, during, and after the war and that the war did not result in any African or Asian colony being granted autonomy or freedom as a consequence of its participation in the war, and that the case of German colonies only resulted in one colonial master being replaced by another. It also requires the recognition that the reasons for why some soldiers of African ancestry in the British, German, and American

277 Santanu Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture: Writings, Images, and Songs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 413.

army desired to volunteer and participate in the First World War was to prove their masculinity and their rightful claim of equality, which was consequently denied to them before, during, and after the war – many finding their contributions to the war efforts erased or ignored from the dominant historical memory of the war that centered on white soldiers fighting and dying in trenches on the Western front. Yet in order to acknowledge these truths, one has to look beyond the national historical memories of the First World War in Europe and North America in order to consider what Andrew Mycock calls the "the complex transnational dynamics of First World War commemoration".[278] The First World War was truly a world's war that extended beyond Europe and white men and women. It is important to consider how other nations, former colonies in many cases, understand their own place within the dominant narrative of the war and what meaning they attach to the role they played in the war. What understanding of the First World War would we get if we considered it from the point of view of Jamaica, Tanzania, or Pakistan? How would our understanding of the life and experiences of soldiers during the First World War shift if we looked at it through the eyes of a black British, Indochinese, or Aboriginal soldier?

Das has succinctly described the important task ahead of us, writing that "if greater racial integration and harmony is the common aim for all of us, we cannot have a robust multicultural society without a robust engagement with the past, however painful or messy it may be."[279] This might very well be an impossible task to perform for supporters of the white mythic space of the First World War as it requires an act of self-disempowerment and the subsequent destruction of the white mythic space. As an extreme form of weaponized historical memory, the white mythic space cannot be altered to include new, more inclusive perspectives. True believers of the white mythic space will always find an argument or an excuse to reject the presence of people of color, as I have shown in this book. I turn my attention instead towards the future creators of First World War video games, films, novels, and everything else in-between by asking how can the historical memory of the First World War be more inclusive when it comes to popular representations of the war? An important step would be the reinstitution of the agency of soldiers of color. We have to move beyond the simple act of acknowledging their existence within the context of the First World War. Soldiers of color should be seen as more than passive background extras used to populate a historically authentic landscape in popular representations of the war that

278 Mycock, "The First World War Centenary in the UK," 161.
279 Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 416.

keeps them in the periphery. It is necessary that soldiers of color are portrayed as active agents that do not exist solely to shore up the agency of white characters. In practical terms, this requires telling stories from the perspective of soldiers of color. A story like that of black British soldier Francis "Frank" Dove who drove a tank alongside a white crew during the battle of Cambrai in 1917, a battle that saw one of the first large-scale employment of tanks, and in which, after their tank was hit by enemy fire that killed four crewmembers, Dove courageously assisted the wounded men in his crew, refusing to leave the tank after sending the wounded men back to the rear. For his actions, Private Dove was awarded the Military Medal for bravery.[280] Dove's story is one of many, many stories that defies stereotypes of what people of color did during the First World War that writers and artists, filmmakers, and game developers can draw inspiration from for their future projects. By integrating the stories of soldiers of color into the dominant white narratives of the war, we can reshape popular depictions and mythic ideas into something new and inclusive.

Its supporters only defend the white mythic space because it is being challenged. Without the threat of intrusion, it would have been unnecessary for *Battlefield 1* players or *Star Wars* fans to spread the message of the inauthenticity of a non-white presence loudly and repeatedly across social media. This is a good thing. It means that white mythic spaces are being actively challenged on a scale that has not been seen before. The white mythic space can only survive and reproduce itself through a continuity of whiteness. Breaking that continuity will inevitably lead to the end of the white mythic space as newer generations come of age in societies where non-white representation, both on the screen or on the page as well as behind the scenes, is as commonplace and considered equally as important as white representation. But we are not there yet. Demands for meaningful representation and diversity have grown exponentially louder in recent years, not least as a result of the Black Lives Matter movement that has consequently highlighted the racism still present in many areas that have been instrumental in the continuity of whiteness, including entertainment, education, and business. In the case of the First World War, video games and films such as *Battlefield 1* and *1917* continue a process that has made the representation of people of color in their specific historical settings increasingly common. Historical memory and historical consciousness is molded in the classroom and there are different initiatives across North America and Europe that seek to challenge the Eurocentric racial bias that exists in the teaching of history that emphasizes non-white history and the entangled global histories of colonialism,

280 Bourne, *Black Poppies*, 141–144.

slavery, and racism as an important history for young students to learn about, to foster a sense of belonging among non-white students, and as a tool to combat racism. *The Black Curriculum*, based in Great Britain, is one such educational campaign that seeks to provide different means through which British schools can diversify their curriculum in order to ensure that black history is recognized as British history.[281] How can we contribute to the ongoing process of breaking the continuity of whiteness? How can we break down the white mythic space?

It is at this point in the book that I turn to you, the reader. In the introduction, I explained that this book functions as a handbook to understand the anatomy of the arguments and strategies used by supporters of the white mythic space. I urge you to use the theoretical framework provided by this book as you confront the white mythic spaces in your daily life. It is there, both online and in real life, that you will most commonly encounter it. Whether it is those who actively deny the presence of people of color in the European past or argue for the impossibility of people of color in magical realms or in intergalactic worlds, we cannot remain passive in the face of racism. Remaining silent would only strengthen the white mythic space. We are all worthy of seeing ourselves, our friends, and our families represented in history books, fantasy novels, or science fiction films. By confronting the white mythic space, we do not allow it to go unchallenged. We cannot allow these arguments to be taken as facts and subsequently reproducing itself amongst those who might believe that these racist notions, disguised as trustworthy ideas of "historical accuracy" or "immersion", are plausible. It is only through understanding the white mythic space that we can challenge it and break down the reasoning behind the continuity of whiteness. Our task is that of disruption. If the most powerful myths are those that appear as a natural truth and accepted as common knowledge then our duty is to pull back the curtain on the white mythic space and expose it for what it really is – a racist myth. Together we can help dismantle the white mythic space.

281 "About Us," The Black Curriculum, https://theblackcurriculum.com/about.

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